

Revolutions, 1789–1917



What is revolution?

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Introduction

The period 1789–1917 saw four great upheavals which, either directly or indirectly, had a huge impact on the lives of millions of people. Since then, in virtually every decade and continent, the twentieth century has experienced an almost continuous cycle of revolutionary advances and counter-revolutionary setbacks. These events have generated admiration and support, or horror and opposition, depending on the aims of the revolutionaries and the beliefs of the audiences.

However, precisely because revolutions are such 'exciting times', the actual term 'revolution' is almost impossible to define in a way that would be acceptable to everyone. The very terms 'revolution' and 'revolutionary' are ones of pride or of abuse, depending on people's different political perspectives.

It is this fear and hatred of revolution that sometimes leads countries to deny much, or all, of their own revolutionary pasts. Yet, in addition to the countries to be examined in this book, there are very few states today which are not the product of revolutionary upheavals. Even Britain and the United States of America – the latter probably the most anti-revolutionary state in existence – had their own, earlier, revolutions: in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, respectively.

Even more confusing is the fact that the word is often used to describe *any* change in a whole range of areas: a fashion revolution, the communications revolution, or a technological revolution, for instance. Consequently, it is often easier to arrive at an understanding of revolution in a negative way, by establishing what it is not.

What a revolution is not

Not all political change and upheaval is a revolution: in fact, the majority of political struggles occurring throughout history have not been revolutions. The most common non-revolutionary forms are listed below:

- *Coup d'état* / *Putsch*. This is essentially the seizure of power by a relatively small group of people, often involving sections of the military. In the main, the aim of such events is to replace one group of rulers with another – the fundamental social and economic features of society are left intact.

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- *Civil war*. Similar to a coup, this often starts as a political struggle for power between different groups of people who want to rule. The struggles become so intense that they spill over into the bitter violence of civil war. In the past, such disputes were common amongst royal families and those related to them; nowadays, they are frequently linked to religious or ethnic differences. But, as with coups, the leaders' main aims are usually to change a set of political rulers in order to secure power and privileges for themselves.

- *Revolt/Rebellion*. Though these can be large-scale and violent, they are not normally revolutionary. At the most, they are massive social upheavals which aim to secure a few specific reforms to improve situations which have become unacceptable. Most frequently, however, they are mass protests, organised in opposition to a particular government and some of its laws. Very often, the rebels claim to be attempting to force a return to a time when life was better; this is a feature particularly associated with the numerous peasant revolts which have erupted throughout history.

Though these political phenomena are not revolutions, each one of them can help precipitate a revolution. Coups and civil wars sometimes generate political weaknesses, and thus create opportunities for revolutionaries, while a large-scale revolt, if prolonged enough, can begin to generate increasingly radical demands and actions.

Revolution

Essentially, a revolution is when people attempt to completely transform the social, economic, political and ideological features of their society. Unlike reform or revolt, it is no longer a question of simply passing or repealing some specific laws in order to make an improvement or right a wrong. Revolution happens when enough people come to see the status quo as essentially rotten and unreformable, so that the only remedy is to sweep it all away, and to put something totally new in its place.

Contrary to popular understanding, revolution – as opposed to revolt – tends to occur when situations are beginning to improve, rather than when poverty and oppression are becoming ever more severe. This is precisely why revolutionaries are the most determined fighters for reforms – much more so than reformists, whose objectives do not go beyond achieving those reforms. This is because revolutionaries realise that poor or deteriorating conditions produce demoralisation and apathy amongst the masses. Not only does this undermine the chances of revolutionary mass actions, it even prepares the way for reaction and counter-revolution, by further weakening the mass movement. If poverty and oppression were sufficient recipes for revolution, then the whole of human history would be one of almost continuous revolution.

This desire for a new society, for fundamental change and transformation, *and* the belief that these things are now possible, help explain why revolution is a phenomenon especially associated with the young. Hope and idealism tend to be more a feature of youth than of age, so it is not surprising that young people –

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especially those who continue their education – are attracted to revolutionary movements in large numbers, and are often the most ready to risk their lives. This is partly a reflection of the fact that, traditionally, societies tend to ignore and exclude young people. While conventional politicians tend to be middle-aged, or older, revolutions frequently produce young leaders who, a few years before, were virtually unknown.

For the same reasons, other marginalised sections of society – women and the poor – also tend to come to the fore in revolutionary periods. The more prolonged and deep-going the revolution, the more such groups begin to take independent action, in addition to giving their support to more general initiatives. This is why total revolution has been described as a 'festival of the oppressed': the belief that positive change is both possible and imminent is a truly intoxicating and revolutionary thought. This is one reason why counter-revolution is often so bloody – it is not just a question of prevention, revenge and punishment, but also a determination to crush the possibility of such hope for decades to come.

However, in addition to the belief in the possibility of transforming society, revolution is also linked to evolution. No revolution is a one-moment event that comes totally unexpectedly, and with no links to the preceding decades. For there to be hope that change is possible, there have to be *economic* and *social* developments that can provide a basis for such hope. Prior to successful revolutions, the old societies will have seen the appearance of new technologies, social groups and ideological developments which increasingly call into question traditional economic structures, political institutions and ways of thinking. These developments result in ever-sharper contradictions in the economic, social and political structures of existing society. In fact, without such developments, attempts at revolution will be premature and doomed to failure – either immediately or at some point in the future. For instance, many would cite the Russian Revolution of 1917, and the final collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, as just such a case.

Types of revolution

Revolutions have various features in common. In addition to those mentioned in the previous section, *all* revolutions (as opposed to most coups, for instance) involve mass mobilisations, sometimes led by revolutionary leaders and parties, and sometimes erupting independently of the conscious wishes and intentions of such leaders and parties. While a coup, organised by a few individuals, can seize political control, revolutionaries – no matter how pure and determined – cannot transform a society without the active support and involvement of huge sections of the population.

All revolutions almost always involve a certain amount of violence. This varies according to the relative strength and determination of revolutionaries and dominant groups alike. In fact, most people's image of revolution is no doubt one of crowd violence and organised terror – most likely coloured by stories of the

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guillotine and Jacobin terror during the 1792–94 upheavals of the French Revolution, or by the operations of the Bolsheviks' Cheka during the civil war between Reds and Whites from 1918 to 1920. Yet, generally, it is counter-revolution rather than revolution which is more violent.

In part, the amount of mass mobilisation and violence will depend on exactly what kind of revolution is taking place. The two main types are political revolutions and social revolutions.

Political revolutions

These occur mainly when new economic and social developments have already begun to transform society, but where existing political rulers and institutions are tending to hold back further changes. The belief behind such political revolutions is that once changes in political personnel and structures have been achieved, the economic and social transformations can continue at a quicker pace, and even be assisted to their final conclusion.

The significant feature of political revolutions is that there is no intention to bring about a major transference of wealth and property from one social group to another. Very often, in fact, those pushing most strongly for a political revolution already have significant economic power – all they desire is the removal of restrictions and the provision of assistance that will enable their wealth to increase. As a consequence, political revolutions tend to be relatively bloodless. In their beginnings at least, it is possible to argue that the French Revolution of 1789 and the 1848 revolutions were both essentially political revolutions.

Social revolutions

These are much more fundamental and deep-going upheavals than political revolutions in that they are attempts, above all, to transfer economic assets and power, and social and political status and privileges, from one social group to another. Consequently, social revolutions tend to be much more violent than political revolutions – especially as the dominant economic and social elites have so much more at stake. The Paris Commune of 1871 and the Russian Revolution of 1917 can both be seen as examples of social revolutions.

What begins as a political revolution can develop – sometimes only briefly – into a social revolution. When it does, it nearly always results in violent conflict between different revolutionary groups. This happened in both the French Revolution of 1789 and in the 1848 revolutions.

Social revolutions tend to happen when a particular economic and social system is seen as having stagnated, or as being incapable of any further progressive development. In such situations, revolutionaries argue that only a fundamentally new type of social system will enable humanity to progress. In fact, they often argue that failure to effect such a revolution runs the risk of a regression to barbarism.

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Revolutionary stages

Many revolutions, if they last long enough, seem to pass through at least three distinct phases.

First stage

In the early stages, revolutions usually go in the directions desired by those revolutionaries who have been most active in pressing for changes in the preceding years. In the main, crowds tend to take action in support of the demands of such revolutionaries.

Second stage

If unrest continues despite early revolutionary gains, a second – more radical – stage begins to unfold. Crowds tend to press for changes more specifically in their own interests, and they become increasingly independent in their demands. At the same time, new revolutionary leaders and groups begin to emerge, who demand that the revolutionary process be widened and deepened. Very often, the early leaders of the revolution now come to be seen as too conservative, and are replaced by more radical ones. Sometimes, these changes of leadership are effected by revolutionary purges and terror – especially if a violent counter-revolution is threatened or is already in progress.

At times, the original direction of the revolution can be deflected into areas never desired by the revolutionaries who helped spark off the original revolution. Such aspects can be seen in the French Revolution between 1792 and 1794, the later stages of the 1848 revolutions, and the Russian Revolution from March 1917 to July 1918.

Third stage

A third stage frequently develops after the more radical second stage: here, the fact that revolutionaries remain in power means they have to deal with the practicalities of government. At the same time, the revolutionary energy and idealism which helped fuel both the early and the more radical phases begin to dissipate – as it is not possible to maintain such heightened levels of enthusiasm and activity indefinitely.

In such circumstances, more administratively-minded leaders come to the fore to consolidate the revolution. In this phase, the more radical aspects are sometimes rolled back, and the revolution reverts to its original aims. (It is possible to see the post-Thermidoran developments in France after 1794 as just such a third stage; see pp. 102–3.) Sometimes, leaders in this more conservative phase can begin unwittingly to undermine even the more moderate gains of the revolution, in part by stifling mass involvement and initiative, and so engendering apathy and alienation. Trotsky and his supporters, for instance, began to argue as early as 1933 that a new political revolution against the Stalinist bureaucracy was needed in the Soviet Union, in order to safeguard against the possibility of the restoration of capitalism.

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Overview

In the course of this book, all the main ingredients and features of revolution will be examined. To begin with, the important long-term preparatory work of economic, social, political and ideological developments prior to revolution will be explored. Though these are essential if a revolution is to break out, it will be shown that such objective preconditions, factors and triggers are, separately or even in combination, insufficient.

Consequently, equally important subjective factors will also be dealt with, especially the relative roles and actions of crowds, parties and leaders, and the responses – or lack of responses – by existing authorities and counter-revolutionaries.

Finally, the radicalising impact of revolution will be treated, both *within* borders, with a separate chapter on women and revolution, and *across* borders, with a look at the international and global inspiration frequently provided by revolution.



The old order undermined: social and economic developments

Introduction

Most societies change gradually over time – often very considerably. In particular, most *economic* changes usually have considerable *social* consequences. Examples of such changes and developments include:

- rapid changes in population totals;
- significant internal migration (e.g. from rural to urban areas);
- important developments in agricultural or industrial technologies;
- fluctuations in the wealth of different social groups or classes;
- wider access to education;
- improvements in communications.

If these changes and developments are sufficiently severe, extensive or prolonged, a society will periodically experience some sort of crisis. The more rapidly a society changes (whether such changes are seen as positive or negative), the less stable it is likely to be, and the more serious the crisis will be. However, this certainly does not automatically lead to a revolution, with its resulting change in the holders of political, economic and social power.

More specifically, economic crises often result from attempts at rapid internal reform and government incompetence, as well as from any changes in the world or regional economy which might have a negative effect on a domestic economy. However, it is important to remember that a society usually falls into revolution, not when the economic and social situation continually deteriorates, but when a bad situation begins to improve, as people begin to feel more confident about the prospects of changing the status quo.

Though economic crises and rapid changes in the social structure can cause widespread unrest, the situation only becomes revolutionary when these changes combine with political and legitimacy crises – these will be examined in Chapter 3 (see pp. 20–21). However, on their own, social and economic crises do not result in revolutions.

The French Revolution, 1789

Though several historians, such as Robert R. Palmer, have argued that the French Revolution should be seen as part of a broader 'Atlantic' or 'Democratic'

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revolution which affected several European countries before and after 1789, it is clear that the general crisis of the *ancien régime* in western Europe was most acute in eighteenth-century France.

Society

On the surface, French society seemed a stable social pyramid, with the king at the apex, and beneath him the three feudal orders or estates:

- First Estate (clergy);
- Second Estate (nobility);
- Third Estate (the rest of society, including merchants, financiers and professionals, as well as peasants and urban workers).

However, the situation was far from static, and some social developments undoubtedly contributed to eroding some of the system's foundations. The orthodox (and often the Marxist) view of the French Revolution tends to stress the importance of social and economic factors as causes of the Revolution. From the 1960s though, alternative or 'revisionist' interpretations have in large part rejected the traditional idea of conflict between a declining nobility and a rising bourgeois or middle class.^{*} Concentrating on local rather than national studies, they have focused on those nobles who became successfully involved in industry and finance; and have stressed that many of the bourgeoisie accepted the values of the nobility, desired the same privileges, and were thus not opposed to the nobility.

While wealthier members of the bourgeoisie continued to be able to purchase titles of nobility in order to obtain high positions in the state, it is nonetheless still possible to see the beginnings of an 'aristocratic reaction' in which the nobility attempted to preserve their feudal privileges and to resist all government attempts to reform the taxation and administrative systems. An example of this, which undoubtedly angered the wealthy sections of the bourgeoisie, was the 1781 Ségur ordinance relating to the army, which restricted commissions to those who could prove four generations of nobility. This was particularly true of members of the liberal professions, who came increasingly to resent their exclusion from a political and social status which they believed was merited by their growing prosperity and improved education.

In addition to tensions between and within the Second and Third Estates, there were also divisions between the higher and lower clergy in the First Estate. A particular tension existed over the bigger proportion of the tithe which was taken by the higher clergy, who were often the younger sons of the most important noble families. These frustrations of the lower clergy can be seen in their *cahiers de doléances* of 1789.

^{*} Estates were different social groups of the feudal stratification system. Originally, social movement between such groups was rigidly forbidden, but over the centuries some mobility took place.

^{**} Although many historians begin to talk about classes from the late eighteenth century onwards, a modern class system did not really develop in Europe until the mid nineteenth century, or even later.

The old order undermined

REVUE DE PARIS 1789



In this cartoon, a man representing the Third Estate is shown breaking free from his chains. Comment in detail on the message the cartoonist is trying to convey.

Population

During the eighteenth century – especially the second half – France experienced a dramatic increase in population. It rose from 22 million in 1705, to 26 million in 1780, and to 28 million in 1789. This caused particular problems for the peasants, who were by far the most numerous section of the Third Estate. Although most peasants in France had some land, it was frequently insufficient to live on, and the population increase from 1700 made this much worse because of the tradition of splitting holdings between sons.

The intense land-hunger amongst peasants came at a time when many of them were becoming increasingly angered by their tax burdens, and by the revival of ancient feudal rights by many noble landowners. Furthermore, many landlords were adopting more modern techniques, such as enclosures, which encroached on the peasants' traditional rights of gleaning and pasture. Thus, in general, most peasants experienced a worsening of their conditions from 1765. Increasingly, especially during times of economic crisis, many of the poorer peasants and agricultural labourers drifted to the larger towns, including Paris.

Economic developments

Though France experienced significant growth in overseas trade and colonial expansion in the eighteenth century, the domestic economy experienced

considerable problems. Many of these can be linked to the four wars fought between 1733 and 1783, which not only ruined the Crown's finances, but also created inflationary pressures that affected all social groups.

In addition, French agriculture became relatively less productive in this period, leading to frequent food shortages and high prices. However, though the worst large-scale famine was in 1709, and the worst decade was the 1740s (with the years 1741–42 being particularly severe), there were many crises before 1787, often resulting in riots and uprisings, such as the 'Flour War' of 1775.

At the same time, the living and working conditions of urban workers also tended to stagnate or even deteriorate (often made worse by the arrival of large numbers of rural poor); and prices for food and fuel tended to rise much more quickly than wages: between 1726 and 1786, prices rose by between 35% and 65%, while wages rose by only 22%. Furthermore, French industry began to fall behind that of Britain, with recurrent recessions in the textile trade, for instance, in the 1770s. Industry, in general, was particularly hit by the effects of competition after the Anglo-French Free Trade Treaty of 1786. This resulted in even more unemployment, and a consequent increase in disturbances in 1786 in textile centres such as Lyons, Amiens and Rouen, and especially in Paris.

Crisis years, 1787–89

Despite the frequency of these uprisings, none of them was revolutionary. For instance, the *sans-culottes* of Paris usually responded to times of shortage and hardship by demanding reductions in the price of bread, rather than increases in wages. However, they do indicate a high level of economic dissatisfaction. On top of this simmering unrest, there then followed two years of poor harvests and consequent food shortages, with the price of wheat doubling in two years and reaching record levels in 27 out of the 32 generalities. In towns and villages, wage earners and peasants were forced to increase their daily expenditure on bread to impossible levels, thus further fuelling a widespread but sporadic popular revolt in many regions of France that had been building up in the years before 1787.

The harvest of 1788 was particularly bad, and an unusually severe winter saw thousands thrown out of work in the towns, as increased expenditure on food led to a drop in the sale of manufactured goods. Added to these problems were those created by the thousands of rural poor who flocked to Paris.

The result, by December 1788, was a nationwide revolt against food shortages and rising prices, which continued to spread till the summer of 1789, when there was another bad harvest. By August 1789, the 'Great Fear' of the peasantry was in full swing in the countryside of several regions, where rumours of an aristocratic counter-revolution, with émigrés leading bands of brigands, led to peasant attacks on châteaux and the burning of manorial and feudal charters. At the same time, in Paris, there were the Réveillon Riots. In all of these, food prices continued to play an important role even though, relative to the shortages of the 1740s, the problems of 1787–89 were less intense. Nonetheless, by August 1789, workers were having to spend some 90 per cent of their wages on bread.

On their own, these outbreaks of popular unrest, like those of the 1770s, would not have led to revolution, as they were limited to essentially economic questions. What turned them into revolution was the fact that they coincided with the severe financial problems of the Crown, and the beginnings of a political revolt by, first, the nobility and, later, the members of the Third Estate. These political crises will be examined in Chapter 3.

Document case study

Pre-revolutionary France, 1776–89

2.1 The purchase of nobility and its privileges

A. R. J. Turgot, controller-general of finances 1774–76, writing in 1776

There is no rich man who does not become noble and as a result the body of noblemen includes all the rich men and the controversy over privileges is no longer a matter of distinguished families against commoners but a matter of rich against poor.

Source: D. Townsend, *France in revolution*, London, 1990, p.15

2.2 An Enlightenment view of the corvée

A. R. J. Turgot, from the preamble to his *Edict on the corvée* (1776)

To take the time of the labourer, even for pay, is the equivalent of a tax. To take this time without paying for it is a double tax, and one out of all proportion when it falls on the simple day-labourer who has nothing for his livelihood but the work of his hands.

The man who works under compulsion and without payments works idly and without interest; he does less work, and this work is badly done. Those who perform the *corvée* are forced to travel often ten miles or more to report to the foreman, and as much again to return to their homes, and so waste a good part of the time demanded from them without any return for it.

Source: E. G. Rayner and R. F. Stapley, *The French Revolution, 1789–99*, London, 1995, p. 13

2.3 The feudal obligations of the peasantry

A. Besnard, writing about the village of *Les Alleuds* in *Souvenirs d'un nonagenaire, in 1880*

As to *lods et ventes*, the acquirer of a property not only had to hand over to him an authentic copy of the deed of acquisition which the feudal lord was entitled to keep for a year and a day, during which time he could decide either to receive these dues or to exercise a withdrawal, that is, to keep the property for himself, at a cost of reimbursing the acquirer for genuinely incurred expenses. He also had the privilege of handing his right of withdrawal to anyone he pleased.

Source: J. Lough, *An introduction to eighteenth century France*, London, 1980, p. 100

2.4 A contemporary view of the causes of agricultural prosperity...

Arthur Young, a famous English writer on agriculture, who visited France just before the 1789 Revolution

July 30 1787

Going out of Ganges, I was surprised to find by far the greatest exertion in irrigation which I have yet seen in France, and then pass by some steep mountains highly cultivated in terraces. Much watering at St Laurence. The scenery very interesting to a farmer. From Ganges to the mountain of rough ground which I crossed, the ride has

been the most interesting which I have taken in France; the effect of industry vigorous; the animation the most lively. An activity has been here that has swept away all difficulties before it and has clothed the very rocks with verdure. It would be a disgrace to common sense to ask the cause; the enjoyment of property must have done it. Give a man the secure possession of a bleak rock, and he will turn it into a garden, give him a nine year lease of a garden and he will convert it into a desert!

Source: C. Maxwell (ed.), *Young, travels in France during the years 1787, 1788, 1789*, Cambridge, 1929, p. 47

2.5 ... and agricultural poverty

Arthur Young, a famous English writer on agriculture, who visited France just before the 1789 Revolution

Sept. 5 1788

To Montauban. The poor people seem poor indeed; the children terribly ragged, if possible worse clad than if with no clothes at all, as to shoes and stockings they are luxuries. A beautiful girl of six or seven years playing with a stick and sinking under such a bundle of rags as made my heart ache to see her. They did not beg, and when I gave them something seemed more surprised than obliged. One-third of what I have seen of this province seems uncultivated, and nearly all of it in misery. What have kings and ministers and Parliaments and States to answer for their prejudices, seeing millions of hands that would be industrious, idle and starving, through the execrable maxims of despotism, or the equally detestable prejudices of a feudal nobility.

Source: C. Maxwell (ed.), *Young, travels in France during the years 1787, 1788, 1789*, Cambridge, 1929, p. 109

Document case-study questions

- 1 Describe briefly the privileges which noblemen in France had before 1789, as referred to by Turgot in Document 2.1.
- 2 From what you have read in this book and elsewhere, explain the following references: (a) *corvée* (Document 2.2), (b) *lods et ventes* (Document 2.3).
- 3 How useful are Documents 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 as historical evidence for explaining peasant grievances in pre-revolutionary France?
- 4 Assess the reliability of Documents 2.4 and 2.5 as evidence of the problems of French agriculture before 1789.
- 5 How far do these five documents explain the social and economic discontents in France in the period 1786–89?



Political crises and revolution

to take effective action against opposition and unrest. If the crisis of legitimacy is deep enough, the forces of law and order (police, army) will become more and more unreliable, creating the potential to transform a pre-revolutionary situation into a revolutionary one. These features will be seen frequently as this chapter examines each revolution in turn.

The French Revolution, 1789

Of the many factors which contributed to the outbreak of revolution in France in 1789, the impact of war, and unpopular foreign policy, played a major role.

The economic problems, rising social tensions and growing administrative problems of the *ancien régime* were undoubtedly made worse, in political as well as economic terms, by French involvement in the Seven Years' War, 1756–63, and in the American Revolutionary Wars, 1778–83. As a consequence, France was on the verge of financial collapse. As early as 1781, after being dismissed as controller-general of finances, Jacques Necker had published his *Compte rendu*, exposing the size of the royal deficit. This led to widespread public discussion and outrage, with strong political criticisms of royal ministers and of the personal extravagance of Marie-Antoinette. By 1786, the debt stood at 110 million livres – an increase of 300 per cent over that of 1776. Thus the debt and bankruptcy resulting from these wars significantly weakened the French monarchy. Later on, the threat of invasion and war pushed the French Revolution in ever more radical directions and into new political crises, including the end of the monarchy as an institution: the execution of Louis XVI; and the political struggles between Girondins and Jacobins in 1792–93.

In addition, there was also growing dissatisfaction with Louis XVI's foreign policy, especially the failure and humiliation of his Dutch policy in 1787, and France's apparent diplomatic slide into the position of a second-rate power.

Significantly, the Dutch fiasco seriously weakened army morale less than two years before the outbreak of revolution. It was against such a background that Louis decided, in February 1787, to convene an Assembly of Notables to approve a radical programme of financial reforms, including a reduction in the taxation privileges of the social elite who made up the Assembly. However, this initiative for financial reform, begun by the Crown in 1787, and necessitated by the costly wars, resulted in a series of political crises during the next two years, which finally began the French Revolution in 1789. It was Louis' ministers, such as Charles-Alexandre de Calonne and Loménie de Brienne, who made the various proposals for a reorganisation of the tax system, including a universal land tax, which provoked so much opposition from the nobles. The first crisis developed in February 1787, when the Assembly of Notables refused to accept the suggested reforms, and Calonne made an open appeal for public support. The political conflict between nobles and the Crown moved from the Assembly to the *parlement* of Paris, and other *parlements*, with a prolonged period of political turmoil lasting from May to August 1788, known as the Revolt of the Aristocracy; during which Brienne's reforms were also rejected.

Introduction

As previously noted, from time to time all societies experience economic and related social crises of varying degrees of seriousness. However, though such crises can result in prolonged and sometimes violent unrest, they are unlikely, in themselves, to lead to revolution. For this to happen, other elements are needed: one of these is the political dimension. Several common features of political disagreement and conflict are present in most revolutions.

Important factors contributing to the creation of political crises include:

- Unpopularity of particular rulers and politicians, often accompanied by popular anger at specific policies – foreign policy and especially war (which always tests the structures of a society in a particularly intense way) can be of crucial importance.
- Suspicion or exposure of scandals and corruption, or growing dissatisfaction with administrative inefficiency.
- Divisions within the ruling political elites, either among members of the government, or among those dominant groups normally supporting the regime.
- Inconsistent or hesitant policies, especially belated attempts at reform. These often, ironically, lead to *greater* opposition, and create a political vacuum, giving opportunities for wider public debate and broad alliances involving groups other than the political elites.

Such political crises, as with economic and social crises, can come and go without ever resulting in a revolution – even if they occur in combination.

However, if they are prolonged and are not resolved to the satisfaction of a significant proportion of the population, political conflict is more likely to turn into revolution. In such circumstances there may be a general collapse of social and political consensus, and a consequent loss of faith in a society's total political system – what some historians (and other social scientists) refer to as a

'crisis of legitimacy'.

In such a crisis, as large sections of the population increasingly lose respect for political leaders and institutions, thereby calling into question the established order or status quo, panic (as well as divisions) can develop within the ruling elites. As a result, the machinery of the state becomes paralysed and thus unable

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The nobles, determined to maintain their privileges and distinctions and unable to come up with any compromise, would only advise the government to make economies. The Crown began to lose the political initiative. Finally, in desperation, in August 1788, Louis made the fateful decision to call a meeting of the Estates-General (a national political institution which represented the three Estates), which had not met since 1614. This can be seen as having far more political significance for the development of the French Revolution than the storming of the Bastille.

This refusal by the aristocracy to co-operate with royal suggestions for reform is evidence of growing political divisions amongst sections of the social and political elites of France. Continuing beyond the Assembly of Notables and the *parlements*, such divisions were even more pronounced in the Estates-General, which met for the first time on 5 May 1789. As the conservative reaction continued, preventing the emergence of any political compromise, several members of the First and Second Estates began to break ranks: Honoré Gabriel Riqueti, Comte de Mirabeau, and Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès (known as Abbé Sieyès) had already stood for election to the Third Estate, while others, such as Marie Joseph Paul Motier, Marquis de Lafayette (commander of the French army, 1778–83, during the American War of Independence) clearly favoured some reforms. By 27 June, about 50 nobles and a clear majority of the clergy were sitting with the Third Estate, which had declared itself to be a National Assembly and, on 20 June, had taken the Tennis Court Oath not to disperse until a new constitution had been granted.

These political divisions were present even within the royal family itself: on the one hand, Louis' cousin, the Duc d'Orléans (later known as Philippe-Egalité), was a radical who helped undermine Louis' position, and even voted for his execution in 1792; while on the other, Louis' brother, the Comte d'Artois, opposed any reduction in royal power. Such divisions made trust and compromise with the opposition much more problematic, weakened the Crown, contributed to contradictions and paralysis, and so gave revolution more of a chance.

However, the aristocratic resistance and political divisions also contributed to the spread of political discontent and agitation beyond the traditional elites who, as in other eighteenth-century European nations, were normally united in supporting royal authority. The effect of their divisions was to undermine the mechanisms of political control in France during 1789. Though the aristocracy saw the calling of the Estates-General as their victory, there were widespread discussions surrounding the elections and the drawing-up of the *cahiers de doléance*. Though the *cahiers* themselves were not particularly radical, the public political space grew to involve members of the lower orders – not just in Paris, but also in the provinces. Since 1749, there had been a growing loss of royal control over local administration, with local *parlements*, from the 1750s, increasingly taking their political lead from the *parlement* of Paris. As public discussion of national political problems widened after 1787, royal administration collapsed even more. This, in turn, encouraged the participation of many social groups previously excluded from political activity. More

significantly, the political expectations of such groups were dramatically increased.

When he became king in 1774, Louis XVI was already aware of mounting political tensions, and had displayed hesitation and contradiction from the beginning. In 1774, he sacked Louis XV's unpopular minister, René Nicolas Maupeou, recalled the *parlement* of Paris, and appointed the first of a series of reforming ministers. Yet he then refused to support the reforms of Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot, controller-general of finances, dismissing him in 1776. As the political crisis deepened from 1787, his hesitation and indecision increased. In the critical year of 1789, as political control mechanisms continued to collapse, Louis and his ministers became more and more confused and contradictory. In particular, after the events of June 1789, he seemed to waver between acceptance of a new constitution, and attempts at a royal counter-revolution – a clear example of panic and lack of resolution in a revolutionary situation.



The role of ideology

Introduction

Despite their undoubted importance, pre-revolutionary factors such as social discontent, economic hardship and political crises – even in combination – are not enough to make a revolution. What is further required, in order to give these general dissatisfactions some clear revolutionary direction, is something to give cohesion to the often widely varying frustrations and aspirations of different social groups.

One key additional factor which needs to be present is ideology: a set of related and coherent ideas and principles about what is wrong with the present situation *and* about how the world could and should be in the future. Ideologies are thus normally the product of intellectuals, and perhaps the clearest example of an ideology produced by an intellectual is that of communism, as developed by Karl Marx.

Some Marxist historians tend to stress social and economic developments as being more crucial, as these allow the emergence of corresponding ideas. However, the connection between ideologies and revolutions is not always a clear one. In particular, sets of ideas do not often have their greatest effect at the time of their formulation – they frequently only become widely accepted at a very much later date. Furthermore, ideologies developed in one country often find it easy to cross borders – especially at extraordinary times – and can thus have a wider regional and even global impact.

If social-economic and political crises persist for any length of time, many people begin to re-examine traditional ways of thinking. Increasingly, as a deepening revolutionary situation develops, people begin to discuss new or different sets of ideas as possible solutions. At such times, almost everyone becomes a sort of intellectual – even those who would normally hardly ever think about economics or politics. It is precisely in such situations that an ideology can provide a common language of protest and a unifying body of ideas. Indeed, an ideology can be compared to a piston which gives force and direction to the otherwise ineffective ‘steam’ of general discontents. The historian George Rudé called this a ‘common revolutionary psychology’.

It is this potential power of ideas and ideologies which has led most regimes to resort to censorship in one form or another, especially since the revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. One result has been that would-be

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revolutionaries have increasingly attempted to spread their ideologies through revolutionary parties; but the importance of these will be examined in Chapter 5.

The French Revolution, 1789

Although there was no clear and unified ideology in France before 1789, by 1794 the French Revolution had brought to the forefront most of the ideologies and concepts which still influence political thought today. The list includes: self-determination, nationalism, democracy, the sovereignty of the people, equality, and even aspects of socialism.

Although it offered no coherent programme of political change, it is generally accepted that the French Revolution was both directly and indirectly influenced by an intellectual ferment which had been affecting almost the whole of Europe since the late seventeenth century. This ideological background to 1789 is known as the Enlightenment.

1740-70

While most of the main texts of the Enlightenment had been published by 1750, it is possible to argue that, at the least, the criticisms and attacks by such Enlightenment writers (or *philosophes* as they were generally known) as Montesquieu and Voltaire on the superstitions and abuses of the *ancien régime* did much to weaken its traditional supports. However, it is important to stress that most of the main figures of the Enlightenment were only concerned to challenge and reform the accepted traditions, values and institutions, not to overthrow them. For instance, Montesquieu's *L'Esprit des lois* (1748), which argued that monarchical despotism was prevented by the privileges of other groups who shared political power, could be used in defence of the nobility, as well as making a case for the Third Estate.

In fact, the Enlightenment in France was more radical and influential than in any other country. From the 1740s, when it began to be more significant, it was an intellectual movement which stressed the need for rational and critical thought to be applied to all aspects of life. Of particular significance were the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, especially his *Contrat social* (1762), with its references to direct democracy and the ‘general will’ of the people.

However, historians dispute the extent to which these writings were known outside the circle of intellectuals in the salons of Paris. In the 1790s, writers such as Edmund Burke blamed the revolution on the subversive writings and plots of the *philosophes*. Although Alexis de Tocqueville rejected this conspiracy theory, he nonetheless claimed that these writings of the Enlightenment had helped undermine the *ancien régime* by exposing and ridiculing its weaknesses. Yet it is difficult to be clear on the extent of the Enlightenment's spread in France before 1789. For instance, Arthur Young noted the relative absence of newspapers, and the fact that political reading was not as widespread as he had imagined it would be.

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Nevertheless, from the 1750s, the *parlements* began to justify their opposition to royal ministers such as Maupeou, and what they called 'ministerial despotism', by reference to the works of Montesquieu, Rousseau and other *philosophes*. This deliberate attempt to mould public opinion in order to gain support for the *parlements'* struggles against the Crown had the effect of spreading key Enlightenment ideas to the ranks of the urban poor, if not to the peasants. These tracts and remonstrances of the *parlements* thus helped prepare the ground for more radical ideas in the 1780s.

Also very important in spreading the ideas of the Enlightenment was the production of the *Encyclopédie* by the philosophers Diderot and d'Alembert, in 1751–72. The intention was to summarise the whole of human knowledge but, at the same time, its 28 volumes helped popularise radical Enlightenment ideas – Diderot, d'Alembert and Helvétius often wrote in glowing terms in their contributions of the virtues of republicanism. Though the *Encyclopédie* was very costly to buy, by 1789, some 25,000 sets had been sold across Europe. In 1779–80, a cheaper edition was so popular that over a hundred printing presses were needed to meet demand. By then, there was beginning to emerge a clear consensus of general principles amongst a reasonably coherent social group, and this later allowed effective revolutionary unity in the 1780s and 1790s. In particular, it made possible a rapid transition from a collapsing *ancien régime* to a new revolutionary one.

1770–95

This slow spread of Enlightenment ideas was accelerated by the political and economic crises of the 1770s and 1780s. One significant influence which gave impetus and currency to such ideas was the American War of Independence and the establishment of the new republic. Soldiers returning to Europe, and especially to France, brought with them the new ideals of republicanism, democracy, and the rights of man. As the crises developed in France before 1789, a host of writers and pamphleteers, such as Jacques Pierre Brissot de Warville (usually referred to as Brissot), produced a flood of tracts and journals critical of the authorities – their slogans were increasingly popularised by street-corner orators who thus introduced them to the urban poor. These appeals to the opinion of a public usually excluded from politics also led to the formation of political clubs.

Louis XVI's decision to call a meeting of the Estates-General, against this background of ideological debate and ferment, finally gave an opportunity for the rights of the Third Estate to be formulated. This was done by people such as Abbé Sieyès and the Comte de Mirabeau: during 1788 and 1789, political terms such as citizen, social contract, the nation, liberty, fraternity, and the rights of man, filtered down, below the 'literacy line', to the lower social groups in Paris, and formed the background to the abolition of feudalism and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen.

However, the influence of the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment did not stop in 1789. After the declaration of the republic in 1792, new ideologies and

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programmes for action began to emerge, such as Jacobinism and Hébertism. Maximilien Robespierre and Louis Antoine de Saint-Just, in particular, were much influenced by the writings of Rousseau; and though the Jacobins in the period 1793–94 in many ways departed from the idea of a strong legislative, a weak executive, and a separation of powers, this can be explained as distortions resulting from the extreme dangers of war and civil war after 1792. Also, it has been said that Robespierre and the Jacobins merely accentuated some of the more authoritarian aspects in the writings of Rousseau, for example, the idea of the 'virtuous few' legislating in the interests of the 'general will':

Though only about 50,000 of France's population of 26 million in 1789 could be said to be strongly 'enlightened' – the extent of royalist and counter-revolutionary sentiment after 1789 suggests that the spread of radical Enlightenment ideas was certainly not universal – it would be fair to say that the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment undoubtedly contributed to the spirit of revolt that began to affect all of Europe, and especially France, in the period 1770–90. Moreover, as we shall see, a significant legacy of the French Revolution of 1789 was to be a set of ideas that were to re-appear in all subsequent revolutions up to the Russian Revolution of 1917, and even beyond, to the Chinese students in Tiananmen Square in 1989.

5

Crowds, parties and leaders

Introduction

For many, the traditional relationship in the unfolding of revolutions is an essentially top-down model: leaders form and control parties which, in turn, activate and direct the masses. Consequently most histories of revolutions have tended to concentrate on the role of individual leaders and their parties – ranging from Robespierre and the Montagnards to Lenin and the Bolsheviks.

Without minimising the influence and importance of individuals and parties, this chapter will in large part seek to explore the relationship in reverse, by examining the impact of the anonymous individuals who made up the revolutionary crowds. Another aspect to be explored is the degree of opposition that leaders have faced from within their own parties – especially at times of political crisis. However, it is important in general to realise that, until the end of the nineteenth century, 'parties' were much looser ideologically, and less disciplined, than modern political parties.

As we have already seen, great historical processes such as revolutions require favourable objective circumstances, such as economic or political crises. Without these, the subjective actions of individuals and parties are rarely able to have any significant effect. In addition, all major revolutionary upheavals have experienced phases in which revolutionary leaders and parties have been sidelined by the masses moving at greater speed and in more radical directions than the leaders and parties wanted or judged wise.

Nonetheless, leaders and parties are important: there are plenty of examples of when objective circumstances were apparently ripe for revolution, yet no revolution occurred. Often, this was because of the refusal or inability of leaders and parties to take appropriate action or, at times, because of the virtual absence of revolutionary leaders and parties. More interestingly, such inaction sometimes results from a lack of unity between leaders and parties, with one element of the partnership being unwilling to push for revolution by taking advantage of the opportunities briefly thrown up by the haphazard course of events.

While revolutions, especially in their early stages, frequently happen suddenly, they are rarely totally spontaneous. It takes decades of revolutionary ferment, and the slow growth of ideas, to produce the moral and political climate in which a revolutionary overthrow of the old order can be contemplated. Thus, behind any revolution, lie many years of revolutionary endeavour and activities.

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It is precisely here that leaders and parties can play crucial roles, by developing critical philosophical, political and economic theories, exploring effective methods of political action, and building close connections with the discontented sections of society. Such revolutionary leaders and parties act like moles during politically quiet periods, burrowing away under the foundations of traditional society, while remaining ready to take immediate action as soon as circumstances change. Leaders and parties thus both help generate, and attempt to direct, revolutionary steam amongst the people, in order to fundamentally transform society.

Sometimes, however, sections of the people, once mobilised into political activity, seek to push the revolution on beyond the aims of the original leaders. This results in conflict and division within the revolutionary ranks, with some either refusing to support further charges, attempting to maintain the new status quo by force, or even moving over to the side of conservatism and counter-revolution. It is this process of revolutions at times devouring their own supporters which has caused real tragedies for many revolutionaries and their parties.

The French Revolution, 1789

Parties and leaders

The political groups which arose during the French Revolution were not really parties in twentieth-century terms. In general, they tended to lack a recognised and coherent political programme, rarely had an organised and consistent membership, and often had few readily identifiable national leaders. Their names, for instance, were often based on their meeting places rather than being indications of their political beliefs – the Jacobins taking their name from the fact that they rented premises from the Dominican friars (nicknamed 'jacobins'), while the Cordeliers were named after the Parisian electoral district in which they met.

Nonetheless, several reasonably distinct political groups can be identified during the period 1789–95. One thing virtually all these parties and leaders had in common was that they were almost exclusively 'middle class'.

Most famous of all was the Jacobin Club, set up in October 1789, after the Assembly had been forced to move from Versailles to Paris. By July 1790, it had about 1,200 members, most of whom were quite wealthy. By early 1791, they had over 900 affiliated clubs in the provinces. The Jacobins, via their Correspondence Committee, even had an international dimension, as well as a national one. Up to the summer of 1791, they remained reasonably united around demands for a liberal constitutional monarchy. However, the flight to Varennes and the Champ de Mars massacre, in June and July, led to a split, with the moderates leaving to form a separate Feuillant Club. Only 72 of the Jacobin clubs supported this breakaway faction, but they had twice the number of deputies.

The outbreak of war with Austria in April 1792 led, once again, to the Jacobin Club splitting into two opposing factions, which was soon apparent in the new

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National Convention elected in September 1792. Though there were no formal parties in the Convention, there were clear divisions between deputies of the right, centre and left. The centre majority, known as the Plain or Marais (because they occupied the lower, central seats in the Convention) were mainly uncommitted, but there were increasingly sharp divisions between the Girondins (previously known as Brissotins) on the right and the Montagnards or Mountain (those who sat in the upper seats) on the left – these last two groups both belonging to the Jacobin Club. At first, most provincial Jacobin clubs supported the Girondins, but the Montagnards dominated in Paris, and by November 1792 had won control of the Club. After a year of political struggle, the Montagnards, urged on and supported by the revolutionary crowds, seized power and ousted the Girondins in early June 1793.

The best-known Jacobin revolutionary leader was undoubtedly Maximilien Robespierre – the only one (apart from Napoleon) around whom a cult developed. The most determined leader of the Montagnards, he later came to symbolise the Terror (see pp. 60–61). Other Montagnard leaders included the young Louis Antoine Saint-Just and Georges Couthon.

The Girondins were led by Jacques Pierre Brissot, Jean-Marie Roland and Pierre Vergniaud, while Antoine Barnave, Adrien Duport and Alexandre Lameth led the Feuillants. However, as the last two groups were quickly eclipsed in the years after 1792, their leaders are little more than names.

More radical than the Jacobins was the Cordeliers Club, founded in April 1790. It had no membership fee and hence had more sans-culottes members; it was also much more in touch with the demands of the poorer classes. During the winter of 1790–91, many more popular or fraternal societies were set up in all the districts and sections (electoral units) of Paris, and in some provincial towns, leading to the formation of a federation of the Cordeliers and the popular societies, with an elected central committee.

Of the Cordeliers Club leaders, the most famous was Georges Danton, associated with him were Philippe Fabre d'Églantine, Jacques René Hébert (for a time), Jean-Paul Marat, and Camille Desmoulins. Though more radical on several issues than the Montagnards, their leaders and members too were mainly middle class.

Also worthy of mention, but much more loosely organised, were the political groupings known as the *Enragés* (the Angry Ones) and the Hébertists. Closely associated with the Cordeliers Club in the beginning, they soon developed a strong following in the poorest sections of Paris, and amongst the most militant of the sans-culottes. Unlike the other political groups, these had very few middle-class members and, as a consequence, became the most revolutionary of all the groups. They were often in conflict with the revolutionary governments – whether the Girondins or the much more radical Montagnards.

Of the *Enragés*, the main leaders were Jacques Roux, Jean-François Varlet, and Théophile Leclerc; while Jacques René Hébert led the Hébertists. All of these had begun as members or supporters of the Cordeliers Club, before becoming more militant oppositionists.

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Crowds

The crowds which, at times, played an important and often independent role during the years 1789–95 were usually socially very mixed, consisting mainly of the more 'respectable' sans-culottes (small employers and wine merchants, shopkeepers, journalists, clerks and junior civil servants) and sections of the working classes (carpenters, stonemasons, shoemakers, tailors, builders and metal workers). The sans-culottes could be identified, not just by their wearing of trousers instead of knee breeches, but by their large moustaches, bushy sideburns and long hair, and by the revolutionary rosettes and liberty caps they wore. Occasionally, the crowds also included unskilled labourers and, as we shall see in Chapter 8, women. Very often the lead was taken by the sans-culottes – at times in alliance with the leaders of various revolutionary groupings, at times independently. Absorbing Jacobin propaganda about Rousseau's concept of direct democracy, they came to see the people as the true basis of government. Deputies were thus seen as delegates of the people – with the latter having the right to remove governments by force. Such crowds were especially influential because, for some time, they were able to control the Commune of Paris and the 48 *section* assemblies – in fact, it can be claimed that no revolutionary grouping was able to rule during the period August 1792 to July 1794 without the support of the revolutionary crowds of Paris.

There are several examples where the independent revolutionary activities of the crowds forced the pace and direction of events beyond those desired by those apparently in control. Some of these examples are discussed below.

Fall of the Bastille, July 1789

The sensational capture of the Bastille, which helped push events from political crisis to revolution, was an essentially unplanned event, with groups of people beginning to mobilise in a number of different places. Though for the two days previously there had been various parades and public meetings, organised by revolutionary leaders, the actual capture can be seen as the first of several genuinely popular or grassroots revolutionary *journées* (actions).

Capture of the Tuileries, August 1792

This revolutionary *journée*, which resulted in the establishment of a new, more radical Commune, and the overthrow of the monarchy, is one of the earliest examples of revolutionary leaders and groups being pushed aside by popular action they themselves had instigated and attempted to manipulate. When Louis XVI had dismissed the Girondin ministers, in June 1792, their supporters amongst the sans-culottes had demonstrated with weapons in front of the Assembly and had broken into the Tuileries palace. Middle-class control of events was further weakened in July, when 'passive' citizens were allowed into the *section* assemblies and the National Guard.

Though reinstated, the Girondins quickly fell from favour with the *sections* and political clubs of Paris – their continued support for the monarchy (especially after the Duke of Brunswick's Manifesto of 1 August) led to the *journée* of 10 August, and to the largely undirected September Massacres (see p. 60). From

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then on, Robespierre and the Montagnards who – much later than the Cordeliers Club, and the *sections* and Commune of Paris – decided to support a republic, began to form their own alliance with the even more revolutionary crowds, and soon came to eclipse the Girondins.

Overthrow of the Girondins, June 1793

By the summer of 1793, the crowds had become used to exerting their independent influence on the course of events, as witnessed by the activities of the *Enragés* during the food crises of February 1792 and February 1793 – especially their demand for price controls. Robespierre neither organised their actions nor supported their demands. After the September Massacres of 1792, the Girondins had attempted to limit the independence of the *sections* and the Commune of Paris. This pushed the sans-culottes into the arms of Robespierre and his supporters – but, at the same time, the Montagnards themselves gave in to the grassroots pressure for a republic. When the Girondins decided to arrest *Enragés* leaders such as Varlet and Hébert, the sans-culottes rose in an insurrection beginning on 27 May 1793. For four days, they seemed in control of Paris – the scale of the insurrection took the Montagnards temporarily by surprise, and Robespierre was initially reluctant to support their economic demands and their call for the creation of a popular *armée révolutionnaire*. Finally, on 2 June, partly in an attempt to curb the more radical demands of the crowds, the Montagnards decided to agree to the overthrow of the Girondins. Thus, sans-culotte support enabled the Montagnards to triumph, despite being weaker than the Girondins in the country as a whole. Significantly, however, the new constitution included the right to work and the right of popular insurrection.

Crisis of July–September 1793

The military defeats, counter-revolution and treason of this period resulted in the Montagnards making a new alliance with the militant sans-culottes, in order to save France from collapse. However, Robespierre was forced to make unwelcome concessions: following another insurrection in September, price controls via the Law of General Maximum were finally imposed on 39 basic items, along with the beginning of organised terror. By September 1793, it was quite clear that the revolution had been knocked off the course intended for it by the liberal middle-class leaders of the period 1789–91. Sans-culotte pressure also led to two radical members of the Cordeliers Club – Jean Marie Collot d'Herbois and Jean-Nicolas Billaud-Varenne – being added to the new Committee of Public Safety.

Thermidor, July 1794

The real significance of the sans-culottes and the revolutionary crowds was shown after Robespierre and the Montagnards, alarmed by growing radical pressure from below, united with the moderates in the Convention to reassert government control. Though Robespierre was able to have the Hébertists and the Dantonists arrested and executed in March and April 1794, these groups had many supporters in the popular societies, and in the Commune and *armée*

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révolutionnaire of Paris. Robespierre used tremendous propaganda in order to justify these purges, yet was very nervous about popular reaction.

Though he was able to carry through his measures, purging the Commune and disbanding the Parisian *armée révolutionnaire*, this clamp-down undermined popular support for the Jacobins. So, when Robespierre's opponents struck in late July (early Thermidor according to the revolutionary calendar adopted in September 1793), there was little popular opposition – proving, once again, that to control Paris all political groups needed the support of the sans-culottes. Though they tried to reassert themselves against the Thermidorians (the conservatives and moderates who had overthrown Robespierre) in the Germinal and Prairial risings, these were suppressed – by then, the cowed and disillusioned sans-culottes were no longer a significant and independent political force. François (Gracchus) Babeuf's Conspiracy of the Equals in 1796 met with little response, and was easily dealt with. The French Revolution at last resumed its original middle-class course.



Barricades and blood: violence in revolutions

Introduction

Attempted revolutions and revolutionary transformations are commonly associated with violence to a greater or lesser degree – whether on the part of the insurgent masses and revolutionary groups, or on the part of the dominant social and economic groups and the political and military authorities. As a general rule, the amount of violence involved in any revolution depends on a number of key factors, including the following:

- the determination of the revolutionaries (the leaders and the crowds) to maintain and deepen their opposition and resistance;
- the resolve of the dominant groups to defend their institutions, positions and privileges;
- the degree of loyalty to the political authorities on the part of the police and army, and their willingness to carry out acts of repression.

In fact, in the early stages of a revolution, there is often much less violence and bloodshed if the revolutionary movements show real firmness – this can be seen in the 1848 revolutions, where, in the beginning, many governments capitulated almost without a shot being fired. More recently, this was seen in the 'velvet revolutions' which swept across Eastern Europe in 1989, where, with the exception of Romania, fundamental transformations were achieved with relatively little violence. On the other hand, hesitations and weaknesses by revolutionary movements at critical points can often encourage a more determined – and hence more bloody – response from the existing authorities.

However, as well as violence in the early stages of a revolution, later stages have often involved what is called 'revolutionary terror' – not to be confused with counter-revolutionary violence and terror, which will be examined in Chapter 9. Ever since the French Revolution of 1789 – and, especially, the period of Robespierre's rule in the years 1793–94 – the principle of terror has been part of the modern revolutionary tradition.

In particular, from 1789 onwards, revolutionary terror came to be seen by many revolutionaries as a legitimate way in which to destroy the enemies of the revolution, and to overcome obstacles to revolutionary transformation. This terror was also held to be crucial in maintaining the purity and revolutionary commitment of the revolutionaries themselves, by a kind of violent and permanent revolutionary process.

Such revolutionary terror is often justified on the grounds that the ordinary processes of law are inadequate for defending a revolution; and especially that a precise and limited use of revolutionary terror is the only way to prevent a much more bloody counter-revolution. This view was particularly common during the violent aftermaths of the 1848 revolutions and of the Paris Commune of 1871.

However, violence is not confined to that organised by revolutionary leaders and groups; the masses themselves often unleash spontaneous and irrational violence, which is frequently more vicious and bloody than organised violence. Furthermore, the upheaval of revolution can provide opportunities for the expression of blind prejudice and reactionary violence, such as the attacks on Jewish businesses in some of the 1848 revolutions.

The French Revolution, 1789

When the French Revolution is mentioned, images of violence and bloodshed are often the first to spring to mind – especially that of Robespierre and Saint-Just sending their opponents to the guillotine. Even supporters of the revolution have tended to see it as a glorious movement for liberty which lost its way and descended into the bloody nightmare of the Terror. However, it is important to remember that the period 1789–95 was not six years of uninterrupted violence, and that the worst phases of the Terror took place at times of often extreme national danger. In fact it is possible to distinguish four distinct phases, as discussed below.

July 1789 – December 1791

The early stages of the French Revolution, which successfully transformed France into a liberal constitutional monarchy, with an elected assembly having legislative powers, were relatively free of bloodshed and violence. Violence first erupted in the summer of 1789 in rural France, with unco-ordinated attacks on the property of the nobility. By the end of July, this had developed into the Great Fear. However, violent attacks and actual deaths were relatively few in number. In Paris, meanwhile, after the Réveillon Riots in April (which resulted in 25 deaths), had come the famous attack on the Bastille, on 14 July, which took place amidst fears of a royalist coup against the Assembly. There were over 30,000 troops in the Paris area and, on 11 July, Louis XVI had dismissed Necker, who was seen as a 'liberal'; Necker's replacement, Louis Auguste de Brietuil, was a known reactionary, favoured by the queen. During the seizure of the Bastille, about 125 of the attacking crowd were killed. The attackers then beheaded the governor, Bernard Jordan de Launay, his deputy and the former head of the city's government. Several of the guard were also killed.

The First Terror, August 1792 – January 1793

What pushed the occasional violence of the first phase of the revolution into more serious and organised violence was quite clearly the outbreak of war with Austria in April 1792. The crisis of war and a developing civil war not only helped

cause what can be seen as a second, Jacobin revolution, but also led to the first of the revolutionary terrors. Tensions had begun to build up ever since the king's flight to Varennes in June 1791, and the Champ de Mars massacre on 17 July 1791, when about 50,000 peaceful demonstrators – gathered to sign a petition for the removal of Louis XVI – were fired on by the National Guard, resulting in over 50 deaths.

Furthermore, the outbreak of war in April 1792 brought early defeats and economic suffering, with consequent rumours of treachery. The appearance of the Brunswick Manifesto on 3 August led to increased demands for the overthrow of the monarchy, and to the attack on the Tuileries on 10 August, during which sections of the National Guard and a crowd of Parisians marched on the palace. In all, about 400 of the attackers were killed, while about 600 Swiss Guards, and several courtiers and servants were massacred by the victorious attackers – this made 10 August 1792 the most violent of the capital's revolutionary *journées* to date.

Further defeats, the Marquis de Lafayette's desertion to the Austrians, the entry of a Prussian army into France in mid-August, and the fall of the frontier fortresses of Longwy and Verdun only added to rumours about plots and betrayal. One result was what became known as the September Massacres, which began on 2 September in the crowded prisons of Paris holding numerous counter-revolutionary suspects. The September Massacres lasted five days, during which about 1,200 out of the total of 2,600 prisoners lost their lives. Many were hacked to death; at least half those killed were not nobles, priests or counter-revolutionaries but merely common criminals – including many prostitutes.

Though the First Terror was ended by the victories of Valmy and Jemappes, one result of the war was the trial of Louis XVI, and his execution on 21 January 1793.

The Second Terror, June 1793 – January 1794

After successes against the Prussians and Austrians in 1792, in February 1793 the Convention declared war on Britain and Holland, and then on Spain in the following month. Early defeats, the desertion of Charles François Dumouriez, and the rising in the Vendée combined, once again, to greatly increase political tensions. Emergency measures were taken from March to May 1793 to cope with the new crisis. These included the establishment of a Revolutionary Tribunal in Paris in March; the use of *représentants en mission* (members of the Convention sent to the provinces and armies to strengthen administration) and *comités de surveillance* (watch or 'police' committees in the sections of Paris); and the setting up of a Committee of Public Safety in April.

However, though these emergency measures were at first intended only to deal with the rising in the Vendée, they became general and permanent after the loss of Lyons. As a result, the Girondins were overthrown in June, and a new Committee of Public Safety was formed. Further federalist revolts, continued defeats, the assassination of Jean-Paul Marat on 13 July, and the discovery of Rougette's

plot to rescue the queen, culminated in the Law of Suspects of 17 September. This law gave a clearer definition of suspected counter-revolutionaries ('suspects'), allowed for their arrest by revolutionary committees, and speeded up their appearance before the Revolutionary Tribunal. This paved the way for the Second Terror which, at least in Paris, was kept in bounds by the Committee of General Security, which supervised the Revolutionary Tribunal. In Paris, it is estimated that about 2,600 were executed over a period of six months.

The story outside of Paris was much bloodier, especially where *représentants en mission* and the *armées révolutionnaires* took charge. The most notorious examples of terror were those carried out by Joseph Fouché in Lyons, Jean-Baptiste Carrier in Nantes and Paul Barras in Toulon. These were, however, the exception rather than the rule. Official executions in the countryside amounted to about 15,000, but many more were executed without trial, or died in prison.

This Terror was followed by trials and executions of the queen and the Girondin leaders in the autumn of 1793. By the winter of that year, the extraordinary dangers that had been facing the republic once more passed away, and the Terror declined after January 1794.

The Third Terror, June–July 1794

There were signs, by the winter of 1793, that even Robespierre was beginning to wish to limit the Terror or, at least, to bring the local Revolutionary Tribunals and *représentants en mission* under central control. The first major step in this process was the law of 4 December 1793 (the law of 14 Frimaire), which also abolished all the *armées révolutionnaires* outside Paris. However, opposition from the sans-culottes, increasingly over economic issues, led to an increase in popularity of Hébert and his followers. By February 1794, it appears that Robespierre had come to see the Hébertists and the Dantonists as threats to the revolution. When, in March 1794, Hébert openly called for a new revolution, Robespierre struck: Hébert and 18 others were arrested, and guillotined on 24 March. Danton and his followers shared the same fate in early April.

In May, all provincial Revolutionary Tribunals were abolished, while the law of 22 Prairial, on 10 June 1794, reduced the 'trial' times of the Revolutionary Tribunal in Paris in order to hasten executions. So began the Third, or Great, Terror, in which about 1,300 people were executed between June and July 1794. However, on 27 July (9 Thermidor) these excesses brought about Robespierre's own fall. On 28 July, he and 21 supporters were executed. After about 100 more had followed him, the last Terror came to an end.



Internationalism: revolutions across borders

Introduction

A common feature of all of the revolutions and attempted revolutions in the period 1789 to 1917 is the impact they had beyond their own frontiers. Although there had been revolutions before 1789 (the Dutch in the sixteenth century and the English in the seventeenth century), it was not until the French Revolution of the eighteenth century – especially its 1793 constitution – that the idea that it was a basic human right to resist and overthrow oppressive regimes became generalised in Europe and, indeed, beyond.

From 1789 onwards, discontented classes and would-be revolutionaries had a model for political resistance and rebellion that could be copied and used, almost anywhere, to turn general unrest and discontent into revolution. Furthermore, the French revolutionaries were the first to take conscious actions which attempted to link their revolution to all of Europe, in a single current of subversion and revolution. One consequence of 1789 was that, from the fall of the Bastille, Europeans were either inspired – or horrified – by the prospect of political upheaval and revolution. Despite the defeat of France and the fall of Napoleon, the first half of the nineteenth century experienced so many revolutions that it became known as the Age of Revolution. After a lull in the second half of the century, the First World War resulted in another revolutionary wave sweeping across Europe until the mid-1920s, with yet another phase of revolutionary upheaval in the forty years after the Second World War, though this last wave was mainly limited to Third World countries.

Especially significant in the international aspects of revolutions after 1789 was the fact that the French Revolution became more than just a revolt against specifically French problems: the demands and slogans of French revolutionaries – such as liberty, fraternity and equality – were obviously applicable to any country in any century. Indeed some of the concepts and ideologies which emerged from revolutionary France – such as democracy and socialism – were specifically developed into consciously international movements by such intellectual revolutionaries as Karl Marx. It is important, too, to realise that technological improvements in printing and communication made the rapid spread of ideas possible – not just within a country, but also well beyond its borders.

Revolutions across borders

This tendency for revolution and revolutionary ideas to become international after 1789 was also noted by conservatives – hence the alliances against Jacobin France, the attempts by Metternich in the period 1815–48 to suppress all revolutionary stirrings, and attempts after 1917 to isolate, if not destroy, the revolutionary Bolshevik regime in Russia. It became increasingly obvious to revolutionaries and conservatives alike that revolution – like economic developments – was fast becoming a globally interrelated phenomenon.

The French Revolution, 1789

This first truly modern revolution was a political upheaval which, from its very beginning, spread widely beyond the borders of France. Indeed, its revolutionary ideas, concepts, language and even symbols went much further afield, with newly independent states in Latin America, the Indian subcontinent and Africa, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, usually adopting the tricolor, in one form or another, as their national flag.

The early years, 1789–92

Initially, European contemporaries saw the fall of the Bastille, and subsequent events till 1792, as mainly progressive developments. Even in England, early reactions were positive, with politicians such as Charles James Fox and the Duke of Dorset greeting it warmly. Most British intellectuals and artists, such as William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Robert Southey, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Robert Burns, William Blake and Tom Paine, were supportive. Many of these, including Wordsworth and Paine, actually visited revolutionary France and sent back reports. At the same time, many of the French political clubs (especially the Jacobins) began to correspond with supporters in other countries, who saw the revolution as the dawn of a new and better age, not just for France, but for the whole of Europe. Within months, revolutionary excitement and ferment spilled across the borders of France, and began to convulse several European countries.

As already noted in Chapter 4, the spread of Enlightenment ideas in Europe as a whole, before 1789, meant almost all educated and talented people saw the first acts of the French Revolution as supporting views they themselves already held. In the early stages after 1789, considerable pro-French sentiments emerged in many of the states geographically close to France – in the Low Countries, for instance, and in the German states, where most intellectuals (including Kant, Hegel and Schiller) were supportive, and where the fall of the Bastille triggered off several insurrections, for example in Trier, Mainz, Württemberg and Hamburg in the years 1789–90. Support was also present in many of the Italian states, but it was less widespread amongst the educated classes than in the German states. In Ireland, Wolfe Tone and other republicans were so inspired by the ideals of 1789 that, in 1791, they formed the Society of United Irishmen, and began their anti-British activities. Revolutionaries in France assisted these developments by publishing pamphlets and state papers for distribution throughout Europe.

Revolutions across borders

One interesting development was the establishment of political clubs (sometimes disguised as 'literary' clubs) designed to make contact and show solidarity with the revolutionaries in France. In Switzerland, where the nationalist Helvetic Society supported the revolution, clubs were set up in Basel, Zurich and Bern. A few, less long-lasting, clubs also appeared in Portugal, and in Amsterdam and other major cities in the United Provinces. In England, the Society for Constitutional Information was revived in 1791, and in 1792 the Corresponding Society was set up in London. This latter organisation was unique in that it was largely run by artisans and other working people – it has, in fact, been described by some historians as the first independent political organisation of the working classes. Elsewhere, as noted above, early support came mainly from the educated middle classes, who were inspired to campaign for limited constitutional reforms in their own countries. Significantly, in most of central and eastern Europe (with the exception of Austria, Hungary and Poland), where social conditions were different, and cultural contacts with France were weaker, there was much less support for the principles and events of 1789.

Events after 1792

The impact of the revolution on other countries changed after the outbreak of the revolutionary wars and the Terror. In the early stages, support for the revolution's ideas had been spread via publications and returning visitors. In November 1792, the Convention issued a declaration to the effect that it would 'grant fraternity and aid to all peoples who wish to regain their liberty'. However, war and terror were to lose the French revolutionaries many of their original middle-class supporters. In England, for instance, only Shelley remained as a convinced adherent. Yet sizeable minorities everywhere in Europe continued to support the Jacobins. Another consequence of events after 1792 was the emergence of a vigorous conservative reaction, with writers such as Edmund Burke in England attempting to prove why all revolution was to be avoided. As a result, European society was now clearly divided into counter-revolutionary opponents (mainly, but not exclusively, the privileged and propertied classes) and 'patriot' supporters (mainly middle-class radical liberals and artisan democrats).

Nonetheless, the impact of the changes introduced in states which were invaded by France's revolutionary armies in the years 1792–94 was far from negative as regards support for its revolution. In particular, occupation by French armies briefly revived the fortunes of the minority Jacobin movements in those countries which, before 1792, had already experienced unsuccessful insurrections. This was especially true of the United Provinces, Belgium, the Rhineland states and, to a lesser extent, the Italian states. Interestingly, Robespierre and his supporters did not really approve of the French armies acting as 'armed missionaries'; during his period of power, he attempted to restrict military intervention to merely assisting revolutions that had already begun. The wars soon turned into a revolutionary struggle against the entire

Revolutions across borders

ancien régime of Europe, with 'the people' and 'democracy' storming onto the stage of European history.

Though the reforms and political systems which came with the French occupations often ended when the French armies withdrew, the ideals of 1789–91, and many of those of 1792–94, remained behind to simmer, and eventually boil over, in the next century. This was true even after 1795 when, under first the Directory and then Napoleon, France itself seemed to lose sight of those ideals. Such concepts as the sovereignty of the people, freedom of speech, and equality before the law – and reforms which included civil codes and the abolition of serfdom – survived long after Napoleon's imperial betrayal had led Ludwig von Beethoven, and many others, to feel that all had been lost.

It was precisely because the ideas of the French Revolution were still felt to be so strong throughout Europe after 1815 that Metternich attempted to establish a reactionary conservative resistance, in the forms of the Concert of Europe and the Holy Alliance. This was supposed not only to restore the *ancien régime*, but especially to suppress all the revolutionary political forces and ideas which had been released throughout Europe after 1789. The subsequent history of many European countries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however, was to show that these forces and ideas had not only spread, but had taken firm root, well beyond the borders of revolutionary France in the 25 years from 1789 to 1814.

8

Revolutionary women

Revolutionary women

Introduction

Until recently, one of the least researched aspects of the history of revolutions has been the involvement and contributions of women – despite the fact that it involves some 50 per cent of the population at any given period. In the last 20 years, however, there have been attempts to redress this historical imbalance, albeit mainly by feminists and female historians.

In general, political and historical analysis shows that most people are politically inactive most of the time; and that women tend to be less politically aware and involved than men, whatever historical period is under consideration. However, as with men, the extraordinary circumstances associated with revolutions both impel and enable women to organise themselves. The turmoil that is revolution creates an environment in which everyone – including women – can associate and act on behalf of their own interests, and can begin to participate in public life.

In all of the revolutions examined in this book, educated women used the opportunities provided to raise radical social, economic and political demands, specifically designed to transform women's place in the family and in the economy – in particular by demanding legal rights and equality. However, women from the lower classes also participated, especially when economic problems threatened the living standards of themselves and their families. Often, such women went on to connect these issues with the power struggles and radical political changes taking place, and made full use of the opportunity to press for legal and constitutional reform. As we shall see in this chapter, collectively, women have at times played significant roles in revolutions. In some, they have even contributed to the creation of genuine turning points.

In the main, however, male revolutionaries seem to have given little consideration to the rights of women. Furthermore, women themselves have rarely gone beyond supporting, or acting through, their men. In fact, many men have apparently feared women's involvement in political activity. Consequently, male politicians and historians have often either ignored women revolutionaries or portrayed them as Amazons and furies, while even many radical men have at times seemed reluctant to support women's rights, in case they appeared foolish in the eyes of other men.

Nonetheless, since 1789, many feminists and women revolutionaries have succeeded in placing women's rights on the political agenda, and in making

women's issues an increasingly important theme in nineteenth- and twentieth-century struggles and revolutions. This they have done by raising demands, and taking part in revolutionary activities, on their own account.
This chapter will examine three aspects of the role of women in revolutions: actions, organisations and activists.

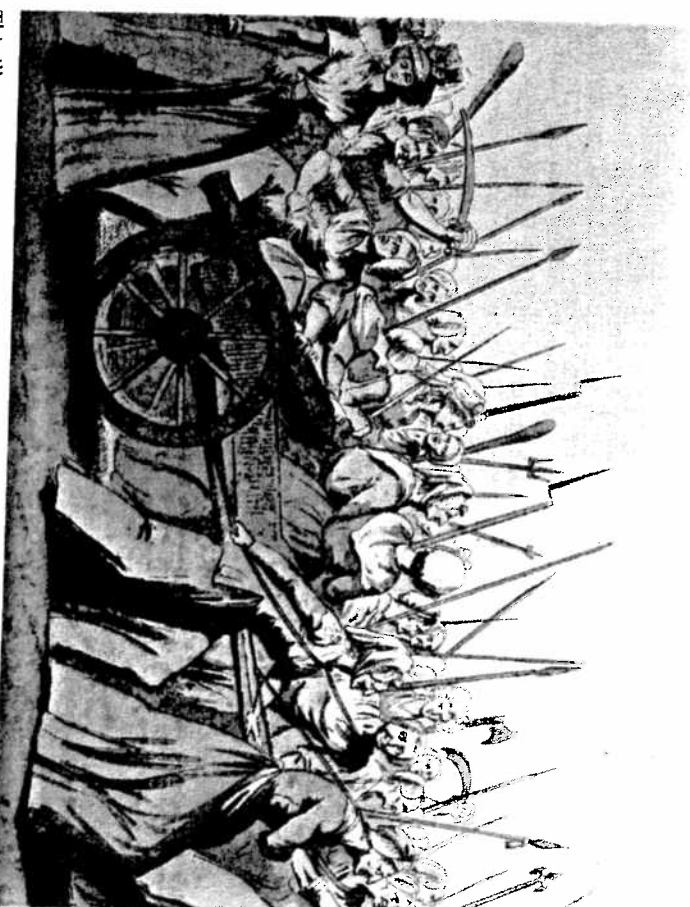
The French Revolution, 1789

Actions

Collectively, women of most social classes played significant roles during the crisis points of the French Revolution outlined below.

The October Days, 1789

Although women – including those from the lower classes – were present in the crowds which stormed the Bastille on 14 July, there is no evidence to suggest they were involved in planning it. However, growing economic problems during the summer, such as high bread prices and the decline of luxury trades and services, hit women especially hard. This stimulated more active protest, including bread riots in August and September. By early September, ordinary women were beginning to act in new and untraditional ways. Market women and laundresses, in particular, were involved in processions and demonstrations almost every day.



This illustration shows the March of the Women to Versailles on 5 October 1789. What impression of the women does the cartoonist seem to be trying to convey?

Finally, on 5 October women from the central market districts and from faubourgs (suburbs) such as Saint-Antoine launched a mainly spontaneous demonstration and occupied the Hôtel de Ville, after the king and queen had welcomed royal troops into Versailles. This led to the first example of an alliance between ordinary women and the radical wing of the National Guard. The subsequent march to Versailles was essentially the result of women giving a lead to their menfolk. It ended with the royal family being forced, along with the National Assembly, to move to Paris. This women's insurrection, while making traditional female demands for stable supplies and bread prices, also took up *political* demands. These included the call for Louis XVI to accept the decrees of 4 August and the Declaration of the Rights of Man.

Taxations populaires, 1792 and 1793

From 1790 to 1791 there was relative social calm, with educated middle-class women pressing for specific legislation to improve the position of women. However, many women were very active in the lead-up to, and on the day of, the Champ de Mars mass rally and petition. On 16 July, the day before the massacre, two women proposed in the Cordeliers Club that all statues of the king be knocked down. This was rejected by the male majority. Several women were amongst those arrested after the National Guard had killed about 50 of the demonstrators.

It was the outbreak of war with Austria in 1792, and the increased economic hardships it brought, that once again pushed thousands of women into action. Often, women proved more ready than men to combine legal methods (such as petitions) with more violent means. In January and February 1792, ordinary women – mostly laundresses, market women and other workers – took petitions to the Commune and the Legislative Assembly, protesting about shortages and prices. When they were ignored, they took direct action in the form of the *taxation populaire* – popular imposition of fairer prices – mainly in the faubourgs and the central markets of Paris.

These protests of 1792, known as the Sugar Riots, eventually came to an end, but continued distress and a refusal by the authorities to take measures to protect women's interests led to the much more widespread and better-co-ordinated *taxation populaire* of February 1793. This time, there was extensive damage to property, and the National Convention agreed to consider price controls. By then the ordinary women of Paris had become a powerful political force, though all leading politicians were still male.

Germinal and Prairial, 1795

In the main, women were supporters of the early Montagnard rule in 1793 and their Law of the General Maximum (see p. 49). But growing centralisation led to disillusionment and a decline in political activity. This was greatly accentuated after Thermidor (see p. 50), which saw a concerted attempt to encourage women to return to the more traditional concerns of home and family.

However, the Thermidorian return to laissez-faire economic policies, from October to December 1794, led once again to increased hunger and want. During

the winter and spring of 1795, women had to deal with shortages and long queues. This resulted in explosions of discontent in April (Germinal) and May (Prairial) – which turned out to be the last popular insurrections of the French Revolution. In March, women took the lead in raiding bakeries, initiating processions and demonstrations to the *section* assemblies and enforcing price reductions. On 20 May, women began the most stubbornly fought social protest of the whole revolution. It lasted four days, beginning with a massive invasion of the Assembly by housewives and market women. In addition to demands about supplies and prices, they also demanded the implementation of the Constitution of 1793.

Outraged, the Thermidorian regime took harsh measures to repress and humiliate the women involved. A whole generation of revolutionary women who had begun to advance women's issues was silenced – nothing that could compare with the Prairial Days would appear again until 1848.

Organisations

In the early years of the revolution, many women began to attend the various political clubs and societies that sprang up, especially the Cordeliers and Jacobin Clubs. Though these overwhelmingly male societies were prepared to tolerate women applauding their favourite speakers, shouting out comments, and drafting and presenting petitions, women were generally discouraged from taking a more active and formal part in their proceedings. Of the male revolutionists, only Condorcet and Robespierre seriously contemplated extending political rights to (property) women. Nonetheless, these clubs, popular societies and the elective *section* assemblies, which women could either attend or even join in some cases, were extremely important in raising women's revolutionary understanding.

By 1793, however, groups such as the *Cercle social* (established January 1790), which had begun to demand educational and political rights for women, had widened to include women sans-culottes. Particularly important were the Fraternal Society of Patriots of Both Sexes and the Friends of the Constitution, which admitted women as full members and officers. More radical women seized the opportunity to form correspondence societies, and federations of women's groups.

The most significant organisation, however, was the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women (SRRW), set up in February 1793. This was the first political interest group for ordinary women to be established in Europe. Founded by an actress and a chocolate-maker, it was linked to the left-wing *Enragés*, and fought for the interests of the working poor, with most of its members being working women. These *républicaines-révolutionnaires* supported the Montagnards in their political struggle with the Girondins, and merged the interests of middle-class radicals with those of the Parisian poor.

The SRRW had contacts in all the *sections*, and played a key role in the Montagnard take-over of 31 May – 2 June, guarding the doors of the National Convention, and refusing to admit Girondin deputies. The SRRW also pushed

hard for the Montagnards to reject a market economy in favour of price controls and the regulation of supplies. Dissatisfaction led them to stop supporting the Montagnards in August, and instead to strengthen their alliance with the *Enragés*. By September, several hundred women were regularly meeting in the SRRW club in the former church of Saint-Eustache, and they decided to increase their pressure on the Montagnards. Demonstrations and petitions finally resulted in a number of successes:

- 5 September – a legal Terror was decreed;
- 9 September – an *armée révolutionnaire* was created;
- 17 September – the Law of Suspects passed (see p. 61);
- 21 September – a decree to make all women wear the revolutionary cockade (a red cap or a red ribbon worn on a cap) in public;
- 29 September – the Law of the General Maximum passed.

However, not all women were so radical – for example, the market women objected to price controls, and to the wearing of the cockade. The result was occasional street violence, and petitions against the SRRW during October. As part of the Montagnard drive for centralisation, on 30 October they declared all women's clubs and associations illegal, and the leaders of the SRRW were briefly detained. After Thermidor, women were excluded from the public galleries of clubs and from section assemblies and, in October 1794, all political clubs lost the right to affiliate, correspond or petition.

Activists

The best known is probably Marie-Jeanne 'Manon' Roland who, influenced by Rousseau, became a republican *philosophe* at a young age, and undoubtedly helped shape Girondin policy. She fell with them, and was executed on 9 November 1793. But many other educated women also actively participated in revolutionary politics, for example Etta Palm d'Aelders, a Dutch woman who campaigned hard for women's rights, including equal education and employment opportunities; and Olympe de Gouges, who, angry that the Declaration of the Rights of Man did not include women, drafted and presented a Declaration of the Rights of Women. Also important was Théroigne de Méricourt, who participated in the October Days of 1789, setting up the Friends of the Constitution group in 1790; she was also a strong advocate of an armed female battalion, though she failed to found a specifically women's group.

Other women, however, were impatient with these essentially bourgeois women and their groups, and instead became much more militant, actively fighting for the interests of the women sans-culottes. The most influential were Claire Lacombe (actress) and Pauline Léon (chocolate-maker), who were both founders and presidents of the SRRW. Imprisoned after their society was banned, Léon was released in August 1794, but Lacombe remained a prisoner until August 1795.

Revolutionary women in France, 1789–93

8.1 The Rights of Woman

Olympe de Gouges documented and presented this Declaration of the Rights of Women, October 1791

Man, are you capable of being just? ... Go back to animals, consult the elements, study plants, finally glance at all the modifications of organic matter, and surrender to the evidence when I offer you the means; search, probe, and distinguish, if you can, the sexes in the administration of nature. Everywhere you will find them mingled; everywhere they cooperate in harmonious togetherness in this immortal masterpiece ...

Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen

For the National Assembly to decree in its last sessions, or in those of the next legislature:

Preamble

Mothers, daughters, sisters [and] representatives of the nation demand to be constituted into a national assembly.

Consequently, the sex that is as superior in beauty as it is in courage during the sufferings of maternity recognizes and declares in the presence and under the auspices of the Supreme Being, the following Rights of Woman and of Female Citizens.

Article I

Woman is born free and lives equal to man in her rights. Social distinctions can be based only on the common utility.

Article VI

The law must be the expression of the general will; all female and male citizens must contribute either personally or through their representatives to its formation; it must be the same for all: male and female citizens, being equal in the eyes of the law, must be equally admitted to all honors, positions, and public employment according to their capacity and without other distinctions besides those of their virtues and talents.

Article X

No one is to be disquieted for his very basis opinions; woman has the right to mount the scaffold; she must equally have the right to mount the rostrum, provided that her demonstrations do not disturb the legally established public order.

Article XIII

For the support of the public force and the expenses of administration, the contributions of woman and man are equal; she shares all the duties [corvées] and all the painful tasks; therefore, she must have the same share in the distribution of positions, employment, offices, honors, and jobs [industrie].

Source: D. G. Levy, H. B. Applewhite and M. D. Johnson (eds.), *Women in revolutionary Paris, 1789–1795*, Illinois, 1979, pp. 89–91

8.2 Women demand equal rights

Report of the proceedings of the Legislative Assembly

1 April 1792

The former Baronne d'Aelders, a Dutch woman, accompanied by several other women, is admitted to the bar. After a long eulogy of feminine virtues, after having maintained that women equal men in courage and in talent, and almost always surpass them in imagination, she requests that the Assembly take into consideration the state of degradation to which women find themselves reduced as far as political rights are concerned, and reclaims on their behalf the full enjoyment of the natural rights of which they have been deprived by a protracted repression. To attain this objective, she asks that women be admitted to civilian and military positions and that the education of young people of the feminine sex be set up on the same foundation as that of men. Women have shared the dangers of the Revolution; why shouldn't they participate in its advantages?

The president answers the petitioners that the Assembly will avoid, in the laws it is entrusted with making, everything that might provoke their regrets and their tears, and grants them the honours of the session. (The Assembly sends the petition to the joint Committees on Legislation and Education.)

Source: L. Kekewich and S. Rose, *The French Revolution*, London, 1990, pp. 59–60

(Note that granting them 'the honours of the session' was a mere formality which, in effect, meant the petitioners would be ignored.)

8.3 Women and the *taxation populaire* of February 1793

Not only were there threats to the government from the frontiers and provinces, there was also mounting discontent in Paris, for high prices and unemployment had driven hordes of the hungry to the capital in search of work. Inflation, a consequence of the vast numbers of *assignats* issued to finance the war, pushed up prices. Early in 1793 the cost of a wide range of consumer goods increased rapidly. Soap, for example, essential for the work of thousands of laundry women, had reached 23–28 sous compared with 12 sous in 1790. On 25 and 26 February grocers' and chandlers' shops were raided by market women who sold goods off at what they considered to be a fair price, although there was also a considerable amount of pillaging. A delegation of washerwomen demanded the death penalty for hoarders. This agitation owed little to the Montagnards, but was rather spontaneous action by women who found it difficult to feed their families. Robespierre rather sniffily criticised the *menu peuple* for being more concerned with 'vulgar groceries' than the power struggle in the Convention...

For a brief period the *enragés* came to prominence with a programme of controlled grain prices as a preliminary step towards a general *Maximum*...

Jacques Roux, the most prominent *enragé*, was one of the most attractive characters of the Revolution. A priest in one of the poorest Paris sections, with a following in the Cordeliers Club, he was genuinely appalled by the poverty and hardship suffered by the common people; hardship that was now so much greater than before 1789. Lacking all personal ambition and deficient in political skills, he wanted something done about the high cost of living (*la vie chère*). In fact the *enragés* consisted only of three to five people, of whom Roux and Jean-François Varlet were the only two who really mattered.

An extremist splinter group of *sans culotte* militants, they demanded economic justice, especially food for all, and condemned those who were making a comfortable living out of the Revolution. Roux, one of the few who was not in the Revolution for what he could get out of it, spoke for the very poorest of Parisians and could not be bought off or his dangerous doctrines silenced.

Source: D. G. Wright, *Revolution and terror in France, 1789–95*, 2nd edn, London, 1990, pp. 66–67

8.4 A meeting of the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women

Notes taken by Pierre Joseph Alexis Rousset during a visit to a meeting of the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women, autumn 1793, with Lord Bedford as his companion

When we came in, the session had just begun. Before describing it I will say that some of these women covered their heads with red caps, in particular the president and the secretaries. This grotesque spectacle almost choked us, because we felt constrained not to let ourselves burst out laughing. This session seemed so comical to us that we each made a separate record of it when we left, while our memories were still filled with these details. All I am doing is copying our notes.

Session of the Society of Women, Meeting in the Ossuary of the Church of Saint-Eustache

Presidency of Citoyenne Lacombe

After the reading of the minutes and of the correspondence, the president recalled that the order of the day concerned the utility of women in a republican government, and she invited the sisters who had worked on this subject to share their research with the Society. Sister Monic was given the floor and read what follows:

From the famous Deborah, who succeeded Moses and Joshua, to the two Frei sisters, who fought so valiantly in our republican armies, not a single century has passed which has not produced a woman warrior... Joan of Arc, who forced the English to flee before her, shamed them into raising the siege of Orleans, and the name of that city is added to hers.

Without my having to cite for you the individual names of the courageous female warriors... I call your attention to the *citoyennes* of Lille, who, at this moment, are braving the rage of assailants and, while laughing, are defusing the bombs being cast

Revolutionary women

into the city. What do all these examples prove, if not that women can form battalions, command armies, battle, and conquer as well as men?

Source: D. G. Levy, H. B. Applewhite and M. D. Johnson (eds.), *Women in revolutionary Paris, 1789–1795*, Illinois, 1979, pp. 166–67

8.5 The Society of Revolutionary Republican Women and the *Enragés*

Report of a meeting of the Jacobin Club, stressing the connection between Claire Lacombe (president of the SSRW) and Leclerc, an Enragé

Session of Monday, September 16, 1793

Leonard Bourdon as President

(A secretary announces that the Society of Revolutionary Women took the side of Leclerc, friend of Jacques Roux; Citoienne Lacombe, President of this Society, wrote to Citoienne Goven, Leclerc's denouncer, to summon her to come to explain her conduct . . . Basire asserts, as Chabot already had, that these women spoke with scorn of 'Monsieur Robespierre, who dared to treat them as counterrevolutionaries'.)

A citizen begins by attributing to women all the disorders which have occurred in Paris. The galleries complain, but he ends by asking for the arrest of *muscadines* as well as muscadins. The entire Society applauds.

Tschereau says that Citoienne Lacombe meddles everywhere; at an assembly where the speaker was present, she asked first for the constitution, the whole constitution, only the constitution, and you will note in passing this hypocritical and Feuillant language; after that she wanted to sap the foundation of the constitution and overturn all kinds of constituted authorities.

These two propositions are put to the vote: (1) to write to the Revolutionary Women to engage them to rid themselves by a purifying vote of the suspect women who control the Society; (2) to send [word] to the Committee of General Security to commit it to having suspect women arrested. (Decided unanimously.) This amendment is made: that Citoienne Lacombe be taken immediately before the Committee of General Security. (There is applause.) There is also [an amendment] to ask the Committee for Leclerc's arrest.

Chabot: You cannot indict just any citizen before the Committee of General Security, but you may ask the Committee of General Security to summon the Lacombe woman, because I do not have any doubt that she is the instrument of counterrevolution.

Source: D. G. Levy, H. B. Applewhite and M. D. Johnson (eds.), *Women in revolutionary Paris, 1789–1795*, Illinois, 1979, pp. 182–4

8.6 Opposition to the radicalism of the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women

An account of the meeting of the SSRW, 7 Brumaire (28 October) 1793

While they were waiting for the members to arrive, a *citoyenne* reported to those present in the room concerning the measures our enemies were taking to starve patriots. She reported on what had just been found in the sewers of Montmartre and the Temple – a large quantity of bread . . . Several people attested to the truth of the

Document case study

statement. Others cried out, 'Down with red bonnets! Down with Jacobin women! Down with Jacobin women and the cockades! They are all scoundrels who have brought misfortune upon France!' . . . Six citizens arrived, sabres unsheathed, along with the justice of the peace, named Lindet, who entered the gallery. He asked for the floor; the President gave her consent. He said, '*Citoyennes*, in the name of the law, silence; in the name of the law I order you to stop talking.' Then he said, '*Citoyennes*, what's at issue is not the red bonnet; you will stop wearing it, and you will be free to put whatever you wish on your heads.' Then the people in the galleries applauded with the greatest outburst of feeling. The justice of the peace, addressing himself to the spectators, said to them: 'The *citoyennes révolutionnaires* are not in session; everyone can come in.' At this point a crowd of countless numbers of people came into the room and heaped the filthiest abuse upon the members . . . The *citoyennes*, unflinching in the midst of dangers, not wanting to abandon their symbols, were struck and most shamefully attacked.

Source: D. G. Levy, H. B. Applewhite and M. D. Johnson (eds.), *Women in revolutionary Paris, 1789–1795*, Illinois, 1979, pp. 209–11

8.7 The banning of the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women

An account of the report of the Committee of General Security, presented by André Amas, to the National Convention, on the disturbances of 7 Brumaire, and the decision of the Convention to ban the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women, 9 Brumaire (30 October) 1793

National Convention

Moïse Bayle, Presiding

Session of 9 Brumaire

. . . *Amas, for the Committee of General Security*: Citizens, your Committee has been working without respite on means of warding off the consequences of disorders which broke out the day before yesterday in Paris at the *Marché des Innocents*, near Saint-Eustache. . . . Several women, calling themselves Jacobins, from an allegedly revolutionary society, were going about in the morning, in the market and under the ossuaries of *les Innocents*, in pantaloons and red bonnets. They intended to force other *citoyennes* to wear the same costume; several [of the latter] testified that they had been insulted by them. . . .

In the evening the same disturbance broke out with greater violence. A brawl started. Several self-proclaimed Revolutionary Women were roughed up. Some members of the crowd indulged themselves in acts of violence towards them which decency ought to have proscribed. Several remarks reported to your Committee show that this disturbance can be attributed only to a plot by enemies of the state. Several of these self-proclaimed Revolutionary Women may have been led astray by an excess of patriotism, but others, doubtless, were motivated only by malevolence.

Right now, when Brissot and his accomplices are being judged, they want to work up some disorders in Paris, as was the case whenever you [the Convention] were about to consider some important matter and when it was a question of taking measures useful for the Fatherland. . . .

Revolutionary women

With respect to these two questions, the Committee decided in the negative . . .

We believe, therefore, and without any doubt you will think as we do, that it is not possible for women to exercise political rights. You will destroy these alleged popular societies of women which the aristocracy would want to set up to put them [women] at odds with men, to divide the latter by forcing them to take sides in these quarrels, and to stir up disorder . . .

The decree proposed by Amar is adopted in these terms:

The National Convention, after having heard the report of its Committee of General Security, decrees:

Article 1: Clubs and popular societies of women, whatever name they are known under, are prohibited. [Article] 2: All sessions of popular societies must be public.

Source: D. G. Levy, H. B. Applewhite and M. D. Johnson (eds.), *Women in revolutionary Paris, 1789–1795*, Illinois, 1979, pp. 213–17

Document case-study questions

- 1 What does Document 8.2 reveal about male attitudes to political activism by women?
- 2 From what you have read in this book and elsewhere, explain *briefly* the following references in Document 8.3: (a) *assignats*, (b) the Montagnards, (c) the *Enragés*.
- 3 How useful are Documents 8.1 and 8.4 as evidence of the political demands of women during the period 1789–95?
- 4 Assess the reliability of Documents 8.5, 8.6 and 8.7 as historical evidence of the activities of the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women (SRRW).
- 5 How far do these seven documents explain the reasons behind the decision of the Committee of General Security to ban the SRRW?



Reaction and counter-revolution

Introduction

Because all revolutions are determined attempts to radically alter existing social, economic and political systems, it is no wonder that there is always considerable opposition to such events. This opposition comes primarily from those with most to lose from any such transformations – political rulers, and those with most substantial social and economic privileges. However, as was seen in Chapter 4, the ideas and values associated most strongly with dominant social groups have an influence which extends far beyond the ranks of such elites. It is this that enables such minority groups to find individuals and, sometimes, sizeable sections of society, to support their plans for conservative resistance, reaction and counter-revolution. In virtually every case, counter-revolution is an attempt to return to the pre-revolutionary status quo, although sometimes new ideas are also required to attract support for a counter-revolution.

There are various aspects associated with counter-revolutions, though all are not necessarily present in each case. Firstly, there is always violence. In almost every known case the violence of the counter-revolution has been far more bloody and extensive than that associated with the revolution. In part, this is because the traditional rulers and dominant groups are normally able to maintain control of existing or newly created professional military forces, with superior weapons. This military advantage is one of the main reasons why most revolutions are unsuccessful. The violence is also partly explained by a desire on the part of the dominant group to teach the insurgent masses a harsh lesson and so prevent future trouble.

Secondly, reaction and counter-revolution normally come in two phases in the revolutionary process: during the revolution itself, and, if the revolution is not defeated, following its collapse. In the course of a revolution, leaders and parties are often continuously on the look-out for the first signs of counter-revolution. At times, these fears lead to revolutionary terror in which even dissident revolutionaries are purged or suppressed, along with genuine reactionaries.

If a revolution is initially successful, there sometimes occurs a kind of creeping counter-revolution – this tends to happen when the new revolutionary regime is forced to cope with the practical realities of government. Very often, the disintegration of the old system leads to a style of crisis management which is often at variance with the original revolutionary ideals. If the support of the

masses is weakened as a result, counter-revolution soon becomes a real possibility.

Finally, ever since the French Revolution of 1789, counter-revolution has tended to operate on two levels: domestically and internationally. As was seen in Chapter 7, from the eighteenth century onwards there has been a conscious attempt to spread revolutionary ideas and organisations across borders. It is hardly surprising that dominant and privileged elites in a particular country fight ruthlessly to protect their positions and possessions. However, they often also attempt to seek assistance from similar groups and regimes abroad. Usually, such support is readily forthcoming, as rulers in neighbouring states tend to be fully aware of what has been termed the 'threat of a good example'. This is especially true of periods which witnessed significant waves of revolution: 1789–95, 1848 and 1917–23.

Sometimes, despite all the immediate attempts at counter-revolution, and all the problems associated with constructing a new economic and social system, revolutionary regimes do survive. However, these tend to become isolated islands of revolution, surrounded by hostile and powerful states. Having failed to crush the revolution militarily, such states will attempt to secure the same result by a more lengthy process of economic pressure and strangulation. Thus even successful revolutionaries have found that the threat of counter-revolution never disappears, and requires constant revolutionary vigilance and struggle. This is something which is exceptionally difficult to maintain over a long period of time.

The French Revolution, 1789

Attempts at reaction and counter-revolution were present throughout the entire course of the French Revolution: three distinct phases can be identified, as described below.

1789–91

As early as June 1789, there were the first signs of a royalist counter-revolution when supporters of the court, led by Louis XVI's younger brother, the Comte d'Artois, and Charles de Barentin, tried to get the Third Estate's resolution setting up the National Assembly declared null and void. Though this attempt failed (about 30,000 Parisians had demonstrated in protest), the court continued to fight back: in July, Necker was dismissed as controller-general of finances and replaced by de Breteuil, a nominee of the queen; while loyal Swiss and German troops were ordered to Versailles. It was this that resulted in the formation of the National Guard and the storming of the Bastille.

Continued attempts at counter-revolution included Louis' initial refusal to accept the August decrees and the Declaration of the Rights of Man, and the various royalist and aristocratic plots to abduct the king and move him well away from Paris. When, in September, the Flanders Regiment was ordered to Versailles, and was greeted by a banquet organised by the royal Gardes-du-

Corps, the result was the October March to Versailles, which ended with Louis and the National Assembly being forced to move to Paris.

These early attempts at counter-revolution (which had actually helped push the revolution into more radical directions) were relatively bloodless. However, the 1791 Civil Constitution of the Clergy, which reduced the number of bishops and introduced the election of priests, gave rise to much more determined and violent resistance. For example, several areas saw some limited reactionary uprisings which were supported and encouraged by aristocratic *émigrés* and other supporters of Crown and Church.

1792–93

It was the outbreak of war with Austria in April 1792 which seemed to give counter-revolutionaries their best opportunity to date. The court – especially Marie-Antoinette and the Marquis de Lafayette (the first commander of the National Guard in 1789) – certainly hoped that the Girondins would lose the war, so enabling royalists to regain control. It was precisely such fears that led Robespierre to oppose the Girondin push for war. As was later shown when the crowds invaded the Tuilleries in August 1792, the queen maintained communications with the Austrians, and with counter-revolutionaries in France, in what some revolutionaries saw as the beginnings of a European-wide attempt to strangle the revolution.

The Vendée and Chouan catholic-royalist risings, in West France and in Brittany respectively, were particularly serious. Here, counter-revolutionary violence was much more brutal and murderous, and counter-revolutionaries often co-operated with *émigrés* and foreign armies. The first revolt in Brittany in 1792, led by the Marquis de la Rouërie, was timed to coincide with the Prussian invasion. In addition to these revolts, there were many others in various parts of France, also in support of Church and monarchy. In fact, it was counter-revolutionary violence and atrocities and the danger of collaboration with foreign enemies which led to the formation of the Revolutionary Tribunal and the beginnings of the Jacobin Terror (see pp. 60–61). Before long, as many as 120,000 men in the Vendée were fighting against the revolutionary government. This revolt and that of the Chouans in Brittany were not finally defeated until 1796.

In addition to counter-revolution in the form of monarchists waging a bitter civil war, and an invasion spearheaded by Austria and by German princes, the period 1792–93 also saw more moderate revolutionaries beginning to have second thoughts. As early as July 1792, they attempted unsuccessfully to ban political clubs and societies, and many became increasingly concerned by the growing political independence of the sans-culottes and the lower classes. For a time, only Robespierre and his supporters were willing to maintain the momentum, and from then on, all who disagreed came to be seen as potential, if not actual, counter-revolutionaries.

1794–99

The length of the French Revolution presents a particular problem when it comes to assessing at what point it came to a close or, more precisely, when reaction and counter-revolution can be seen as having triumphed. Some historians argue that Robespierre's suppression of the Commune, the *Enragés* and then the Hébertists and Dantonists, in the period March–April 1794, marks the first step in counter-revolution. Many more see Thermidor, in July 1794, when Robespierre was overthrown (see p. 50), as the turning point for successful reaction and counter-revolution. Beginning with the execution of Robespierre and 21 of his supporters on 28 July, the Thermidorians went on to guillotine over 100 more Montagnards and Commune members in the space of a few days. The pace of executions then slowed down, to only 63 in the next ten months, though the Jacobin Club was closed and the popular protests and revolts of Germinal and Prairial 1795 were ruthlessly suppressed. Significantly, army leaders became increasingly important.

After Thermidor, there followed what has been called a White Terror, in which royalists and returned *émigrés*, along with alienated members of the wealthy middle classes, formed groups such as the Company of the Sun and the Company of Jesus to take revenge on Robespierrists and other members of the popular societies, political clubs and the *comités de surveillance*. In Lyons and the Rhône valley, there were prison massacres of Robespierre's supporters and other militants, similar to the September Massacres of 1792. Elsewhere, especially in *départements* of north-west and south-east France, there was considerable violence: in the south-east in 1795 groups of middle-class youths killed over 2,000 supporters of revolution; while over 1,000 republican prisoners were butchered by Chouan rebels in Brittany. Though this counter-revolutionary violence did not take place everywhere in France, it continued through 1796 and most of 1797. In Paris itself, the violence was more limited: middle-class gangs of the *jeunesse dorée* (gilded youth) and the *muscadins* (tops) mainly contented themselves with beating up Jacobins and anyone who looked like a possible sans-culotte militant, and there was relatively little serious bloodshed.

Despite these developments, the Thermidorian reaction was *not* a complete counter-revolution. On the contrary, they had themselves supported some of the Jacobins' measures, and generally wanted to return to the more moderate 1789–91 phase of the revolution. This was partly reflected by the new constitution of 1795, which set up the Directory, and a legislature of two Houses: the Council of the 500, and the Council of Elders. In elections in the spring of 1797, most seats were won by royalists and other conservatives, and laws were soon passed which were more sympathetic to *émigrés* and refractory priests (priests who refused to accept the Civil Constitution and its oath of loyalty to the nation). Soon, however, the Directory purged the monarchists, in the Fructidor Coup of 3–4 September.

If Thermidor was thus *not* a victorious counter-revolution, many would see the 18th Brumaire Coup of 9–10 November 1799, when Napoleon Bonaparte overthrew the Directory and set up the Consulate, as the final chapter of the

French Revolution, while others would argue that the end only finally came in 1804, when Napoleon declared himself emperor. Yet even then there was no attempt to revert to the pre-1789 situation, and most aspects of the revolution continued to survive, with the result that many see Napoleon's wars as both defending and extending the Revolution. Consequently, counter-revolution is seen as only finally triumphing following his defeat in 1814, which then allowed the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy in 1815.

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Revolutionary continuity: victory and defeat

Introduction

Although a counter-revolution almost always results in the overthrow, and often the execution, of revolutionary leaders, some aspects of the revolution may well remain in place. Thus it is rare that the continuity of a revolution is completely broken by counter-revolution. This tends to hold true whether it is a counter-revolution from within the revolutionary movement itself, or a restoration of rulers and elites initially toppled by the revolution.

In the former case, despite often dramatic breaks with the original aims and practices of the revolution, counter-revolutionary leaders frequently claim to be acting in accordance with early revolutionary ideals. More importantly, at least some of the achievements and even the institutions of the revolution will survive – even if outward appearances are essentially a shell with little revolutionary content.

Even in the latter case, involving the return of pre-revolutionary elites, it is frequently impossible for such counter-revolutionary leaders to put the clock back completely: some of the revolutionary changes are able to survive counter-revolution and restoration, especially if the revolution has been a deep and prolonged event.

Thus, although revolutions often fall victim to a victorious counter-revolution – especially if their aims and aspirations are never fully achieved – it is not always a case of total defeat. Indeed, some of the incremental gains which survive the counter-revolution can provide a more favourable space for the growth of revolutionary possibilities than had existed before. This, and the political and organisational experiences gained during the revolutionary process, can result in a victorious and more long-lasting revolution the next time around. It is precisely here that revolutionary parties can play a key role by maintaining a collective memory of earlier revolutions in order to ensure continuity between revolutionary upheavals and the intervening periods of passivity and reaction.

The French Revolution, 1789

On one level, it is easy to claim that the 1789 revolution was clearly defeated, given that, after less than 20 years, the Bourbon monarchy and the great landowners returned in triumph in 1815, following Napoleon I's defeat and

Revolutionary continuity

capture. Even before then, revolutionary continuity had been broken: first by Thermidor in 1794 then, in succession, by the emergence of the Consulate and the Empire. Any remaining influences of the revolution were further weakened in the fifty years after 1815, as France overthrew the Bourbons again in 1830; installed Louis Philippe and then later overthrew him in 1848; and then saw Louis Napoleon's coup of 1851, to be followed by his becoming Napoleon III during the Second Empire. Certainly, long before then, no rulers were claiming to be the political descendants of Robespierre and the Jacobins.

Furthermore, it is dramatically obvious that, after 1815, the Congress Powers as a whole tried simultaneously to restore the old order and to suppress the political and ideological currents which had raced across Europe after 1789. However, this victory of 1815 was more apparent than real, more one of outward appearance than inner substance. This was because, in the space of those twenty years of revolution and war, the old society had been disrupted and, at least partially, transformed beyond a point of no return. Above all, the ideals of 1789, and of 1792–94, became a permanent part of political debate throughout Europe.

In France itself, despite the restoration of the Bourbons and the subsequent conservative reaction, the revolution had successfully destroyed several features of the *ancien régime* for good. The Bourbons soon realised that some of the core accomplishments of the revolution, and especially of the Constituent Assembly, were permanent and irreversible.

Victory

Such irreversible victories fall into three main areas: politics/ideology, society and the economy.

Politics/ideology

The particular gain here was that it proved impossible to return fully to the idea of the divine right of kings and an absolute monarchy. It soon became clear, even to the Bourbons, that there was no way back to their past powers and glories. From now on, French people expected there to be an elected assembly with the right to pass laws. Furthermore, it was soon clear that the wealthier sections of the middle-class – the old Third Estate – were to play an increasingly significant role in politics. The new administrative system of *départements*, districts and *communes* also survived.

Society

Although the republic had been replaced by a returned monarchy, the pre-1789 aristocratic and hierarchical society (along with most of its institutions) had been shattered beyond repair. Returning *émigré* landowners, though able to regain ownership of about 25 per cent of the land they had lost, found the country had changed too much for them to restore any more than a shadow of their former power, privileges and prestige.

In particular, the middle classes and the wealthier peasants successfully retained the lands they had bought during the Revolution – whether these had

been taken from the Church, or from *émigrés* and those suspected of supporting counter-revolution. These people now owned some 40 per cent or more of the land in France, which greatly increased their social status and influence. They were also able to ensure that the principle of the career 'open to talent', and the more rational and liberal legal, religious and educational systems constructed after 1789, survived the counter-revolution.

Economy

The revolutionaries of 1789–94, though no longer in power, were also victorious in the long run, in the sense that they had succeeded in wiping out the remnants of feudalism. Although it is possible to argue that the French economy before 1789 was already moving in the direction of a capitalist economy, the fact that it continued to do so after 1789 – and at a much faster rate – owed a great deal to the actions of 1789–91. The economic barriers resulting from feudal privilege and local customs duties, and the old taxes, were swept away for good, thus enabling a single national market to develop. Especially important here were the abolition of the old internal customs barriers, the feudal dues, and the restrictive practices of the guild system. This was also helped by the revolutionary reform of decimalisation, which established a uniform system of weights and measures.

Defeat

However, for the *sans-culottes*, and for urban workers and the poor – all of whom had played leading roles in 1789, 1792 and 1793–94 – revolutionary gains had begun to disappear after Thermidor. The rise of Napoleon and then the return of the Bourbons merely consolidated their defeat. For example, the price controls they had long demanded and finally achieved (via the Law of the General Maximum) had quickly been replaced after 1794 by a return to the 'free' market economy desired by the wealthy middle classes. In addition, they also lost the right to vote, which they had only briefly enjoyed. Their attempts at uprising in Germinal and Prairial 1795 were crushed; their discontent, however, continued after 1815 and rose to the surface again in 1848 and 1871.

Another revolutionary defeat came in 1796, when Babeuf's egalitarian conspiracy was also crushed. In the long term, however, this defeat did not mean the total elimination of revolution. On the contrary, Babeuf had begun to develop primitive socialist theories, and to link these with the Jacobin traditions of direct democracy, popular action, and insurrection. Quite clearly for his supporters, and for later socialists, Thermidor and its aftermath and then the Bourbon restoration meant the 1789 revolutionary slogans of liberty, equality and fraternity still remained to be achieved – even if the middle classes now thought otherwise. For those people who remained committed to the gains of 1792–94, only another revolution would bring them the popular democracy and the economic equality they continued to desire. Though temporarily defeated, many began almost immediately to resume the revolutionary struggle.

Chronologies

The French Revolution

- 1787** *May–July*: Suspension of the *parlements*; Revolt of the Aristocracy
Aug–Sep: Brienne replaced by Necker; *parlements* recalled
- 1789** *Apr*: Riots in Paris and the provinces
5 May: Meeting of the Estates-General
20 June: Tennis Court Oath
17–14 July: Dismissal of Necker; fall of the Bastille
4 Aug: Abolition of feudal rights; Declaration of Rights
5 Oct: March of the Women to Versailles
2 Nov: Decrees on the Church and local government
- 1790** *Feb–Mar*: Religious conflict in Nîmes
June: Abolition of the nobility
July: Civil Constitution of the Clergy
Nov: Enforcement of the clerical oath, accepted by Louis XVI
- 1791** *June*: Flight to Varennes
July: Massacre on the Champ de Mars
Sep: King accepts the Constitution of 1791; Constituent Assembly dissolved
Nov–Dec: King vetoes decrees against *émigrés* and clergy
- 1792** *Mar*: Brissotin Ministry
Apr: Declaration of war with Austria
June: First invasion of the Tuileries
July: Brunswick Manifesto (published in Paris 3 August) and agitation in the Paris sections
Aug: Revolution of 10 August; insurrectionary Commune set up; king suspended; beginning of the First Terror
Sep: Fall of Verdun; September Massacres; Battle of Valmy; meeting of the Convention; abolition of the monarchy; republic declared
Dec: Trial of the king
- 1793** *Jan*: Execution of the king
Feb: War with Britain and Holland; food riots in Paris; the *Enragés* agitations
Mar: War with Spain; outbreak of revolt in the Vendée
Apr: Establishment of the Committee of Public Safety; first Maximum (grain)
May: Federalist revolts at Lyons, Marseilles, Caen and Bordeaux
June: Fall of the Girondins; Jacobin Constitution of 1793
- 1793** *July*: Robespierre entered the Committee of Public Safety; Revolutionary Tribunal reorganised; assassination of Marat
Aug: *Levée en masse* (conscription); surrender of Toulon to the British
Sep: Beginning of Year II of the Republic; Terror officially established; creation of the Parisian *armée révolutionnaire*; Law of Suspects; Law of General Maximum
Oct: Government declared 'revolutionary until the peace'; recapture of Lyons by republican forces; trial and execution of the Girondins
Nov: Revolutionary calendar adopted
Dec: Reorganisation of revolutionary government by the Law of 14 Frimaire; defeat of the Vendée rebels
- 1794** *Feb*: Laws of Ventôse (to confiscate property of suspects, and to give proceeds to the poor)
Mar–Apr: Arrest and execution of the Hébertists and Dantonists
May: Attempts to assassinate Robespierre
June: Law of 22 Prairial
July: Maximum wage legislation; arrest and execution of Robespierre and his followers
Nov: Jacobin Club closed
Dec: Abolition of the Law of General Maximum
- 1795** *Apr*: Rising of Germinal
May: Rising of Prairial
Aug: Constitution of the Year III; Law of the Two-Thirds
Oct: Rising of Vendémiaire; dissolution of the Convention and the beginning of the Directory